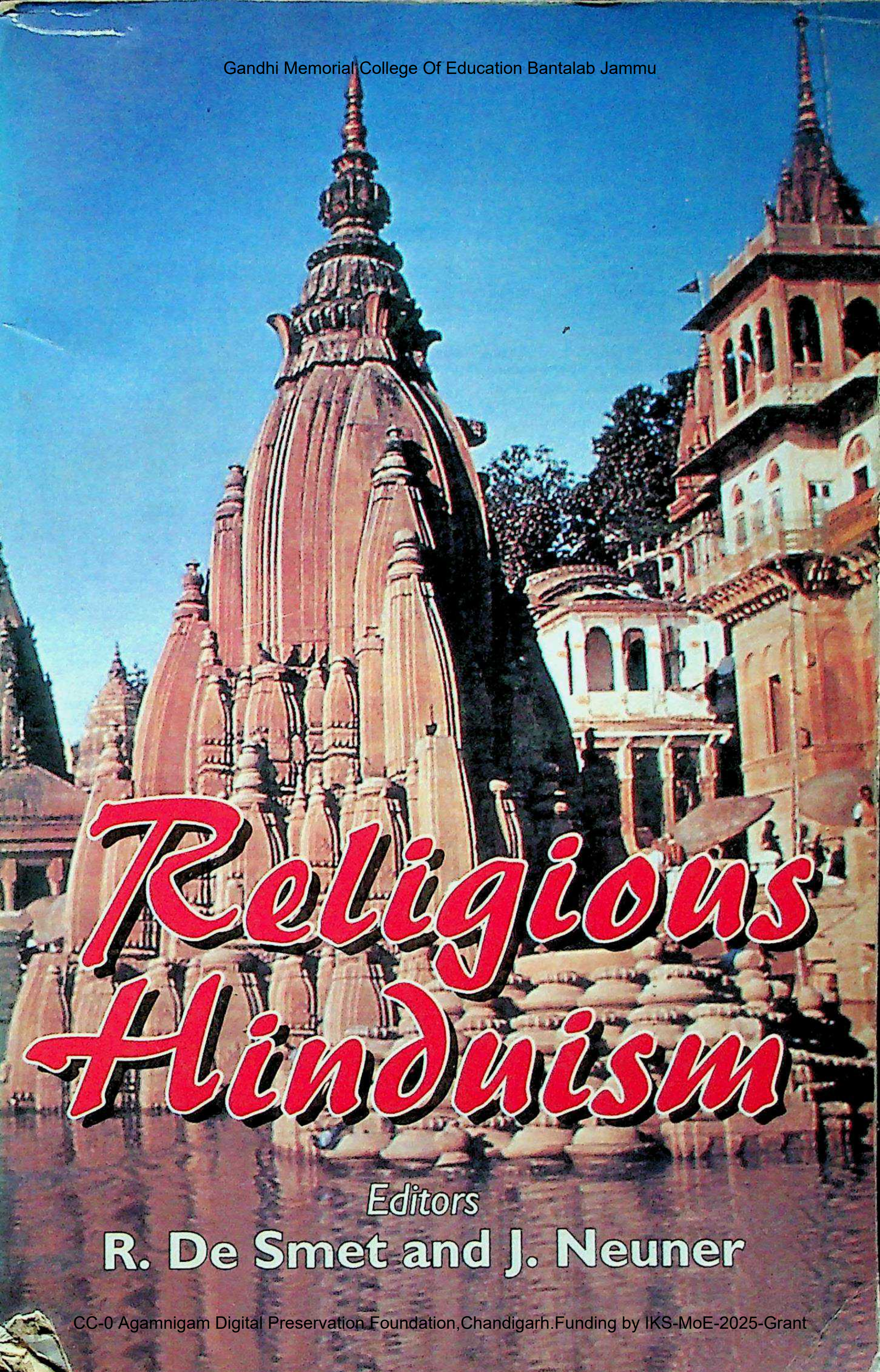

Religious Hinduism

Editors

R. De Smet and J. Neuner

2/96

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FOREWORD

(R. De Smet, editor)

Ever since its third edition was exhausted, *Religious Hinduism* has been the object of multiplied requests for a fourth edition of it. In spite of several recent publications which approach its scope, it remains unrivalled for what a reviewer pointed out, its detailed comprehensiveness, its scholarly reliability, the penetration of its understanding and its empathy for the multiform microcosm which *faute de mieux* has been called Hinduism (cf. *Foreword* of third edition).

It had been directed primarily to the teachers in our Christian institutions (Secondary, High Schools 4633, Colleges 194, Teacher Training 29) to help them acquaint themselves more accurately and sympathetically with the religious background of their Hindu students. It was perhaps found by them to be too richly informative to satisfy their needs. Others, however, theological students, social workers, interfaith dialoguists, Christians and even Hindus keen to grasp Hinduism in some depth, availed themselves of its solid fare. Even some Hindu university teachers consider it a precious resource for the preparation of their lectures.

For its fourth edition this book had to be revised and updated. The following modifications are notable:

P. Fallon gave us a quite new Introduction. Being his last important piece of writing before he died suddenly, it stands as it were, as his testament and a summary of his attitudes toward the Hindus and their cherished beliefs and practices.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the previous editions were found to derive too closely from Ch.2 of Vol. 4 of *The Cultural Heritage of India,* edited by H. Bhattacharyya; they have been replaced by an altogether original survey of Hinduism by Peter Johanns, the forerunner and inspirer of many in our team. It was first published in England by the Catholic Truth Society in 1934. Of ch. 3 and 4, new versions appear. Ch. 19 has been lightened of its section D (less relevant to our purpose) which has been replaced by a section on the Hindi Ramayana of Tulsidas, derived closely from C. Bulcke's own formulation in other writings. Of ch. 24, I have resumed my primitive authorship of almost the totality of the text and obtained an additional section on Vīraśaivism from J. Gonsalves. In ch. 26, the paragraph on Aurobindo in section C.3. has been developed by a specialist, J.Feys. Ch. 29 had to be written completely anew to be up to date, and I am solely responsible for its content. The other chapters originally composed by R. Antoine or P. Fallon have been improved according to their own suggestions. Other modifications in diverse chapters have been put within asterisks to mark this editor's responsibility. Updated bibliographies have been provided and placed at the end of each corresponding chapter. A table of abbreviations used in them is provided after the Table of Contents.

The writers in our Jesuit team may now be presented. Several of them have already passed beyond the veil of ignorance and reached the blissful goal of their devoted life. While grieving their absence from our midst, we can but rejoice in their eternal happiness.

Fr. **Robert Antoine,** (1914-1981) B.A, Classics, Lic. Phil., Lic. Theol., M.A. Sanskrit (Calcutta), was born in Belgium, arrived in India in 1939 and became an Indian citizen in 1950. His untimely death, from a liver cancer, occurred in 1981. During the 42 years he spent in India, mainly in Calcutta, he contributed much to the Bengali culture, the diffusion of Sanskrit and the life of the Church in Bengal. In the words of Felix Raj, "he was an eminent priest, a scholar, an accomplished teacher, a gifted musician and singer and a dear friend." From 1956, he taught as a lecturer in the Department of Comparative Literature of the Jadavpur University. An admiring student evoked him as follows: "With his kurta, pyjamas, slippered feet and suntanned complexion, ... he was virtually the established Guru of the Hindu Bengali youth of Jadavpur University, and the much-esteemed guide, philosopher and friend of many orthodox and influential Hindu Bengali families." He radiated among them from Shānti Bhavan. This he had founded with P. Fallon in 1951 as a centre of inter-faith, inter-cultural dialogue and their home amidst a population of middle-class intelligentsia. For many years, their periodic *Darsan Cakra* attracted keen professors of philosophy and other intellectuals but it was above all a centre of friendly conversations, music, songs, bhajans and eucharistic liturgy. From there he produced his ten books (Sanskrit manual, Bengali hymn book, translations, indological essays, ecumenical dialogue, etc.) and as many articles.

Fr. **Camille Bulcke** (1909-1982), M.Sc. (Eng.), Lic. Phil., Lic. Theol., M.A. Hindi and Ph.D. (Allahabad) created a sensation when he presented in Hindi to the Allahabad University his doctoral dissertation, *Rāma Kathā*. This critical and insightful study of the origin and development of the *Rāmāyaṇa* established his reputation and was soon to become a textbook for postgraduate students. Henceforth "Baba" Bulcke was to be the chief guest of many a meeting in the vast Hindi-speaking belt. His death raised all over it lamentations, obituary discourses, memorial articles and commemoration meetings which were unanimously laudatory, Born in Belgium, arrived in India in 1935, he obtained Indian citizenship in 1950. There were two poles of his scholarship, his indological studies and his translations of the Bible. Their most notable results were his *English-Hindi dictionary* and *Rāma Kathā*, and *Muktidātā* (the four Gospels in one narrative) and *The New Testament* in Hindi. His only regret when he died was that he could not finish the last 150 pages of his translation of the whole Bible.

Guy Deleury, Lic. Phil., Lic. Theol., M.A. Indology (Sorbonne), Ph.D. (Poona), born in Paris in 1922, arrived in India in 1948. A founder of Snehasadan, Pune, he was a corresponding member of L'Ecole francaise d'Extrême-Orient. He published a scholarly monograph on *The Cult of Vithoba* and a French translation of Tukaram's *abhangs, Psaumes du Pelerin.* Since leaving the Jesuit order, he lives in Paris and continues to write about India but in French.

Fr. **Richard De Smet,** B.A. Classics, Lic. Phil., Lic.Theol., Ph.D. (Gregorian), born in Belgium in 1916, reached India in 1946. After studying Sanskrit in Calcutta, he wrote his doctoral dissertation on *The Theological Method of Śaṅkarācārya.* Since 1954, he has been teaching philosophy, especially Indian philosophy, in Jñānadeepa Vidyāpeeth, Pune. A member of the All-India Philosophical Congress and of The Philosophical Association, he has been the first president of the Association of Christian Philosophers of India from its foundation till 1994. He was a member of the Editorial Consulting Committee of the *Marāthi Encylopedia of Philosophy* to which he contributed 68 articles. His numerous writings are mainly philosophical, indological or interfaith-dialogical.

Fr. **Pierre Fallon** (1912-1985), Lic. Indology (Louvain), Lic. Phil., Lic. Theol., M.A. Bengali (Calcutta), was born in Belgium, came to India in 1936 and opted for Indian citizenship in 1950. A staff-member of St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, he founded Shānti-bhavan with Fr. Antoine in 1950 and contributed much to make it a living centre of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Ten years later he founded a similar Shānti-sadan in North Calcutta and later took charge of Shānti-neer. He was an educationist of renown but also took charge of charitable work for the famine-stricken and the refugees. For twenty-five years he was a much appreciated professor of French literature at the University of Calcutta: he became a member of its Senate and its Academic Council. He was much in demand as a public orator in Bengali and as a contributor to many journals and other publications in Bengali, French or English. But his heart was in his translations from the Bible and other texts for Christian worship in Bengali and even more in his constant practice of interfaith dialogue. The last words he typed a few minutes before his fatal heart attack were: "Dialogue with Persons of Other Faiths." They summed up the whole of his life-work.

Fr. **Jan Feys,** born in Belgium in 1933, graduated from the Louvain University, came to India in 1960 where he obtained his Ph.D. from Ranchi University. His published dissertation deals with *The Philosophy of Evolution in Śri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin*. A professor of both General and Indian Philosophy in St. Albert College, Ranchi, he made himself very proficient in Hindi and has been a frequent contributor to Hindi societies of Philosophy where his chaste Hindi is much appreciated. Besides publishing a number of books, chiefly on Śri Aurobindo, he founded and directed a scholarly periodical *Sevārtham*. For reasons of health, he is now retired in Belgium.

Fr. **James Gonsalves,** B.A.Phil., B.A. Theol., M.A. Kannada Lit., was born in Karnataka in 1949 and ordained a Jesuit priest in 1980. After teaching for some years Indian Christian Theology and Philosophy in St. Joseph's Seminary, Mangalore, he is now in Dharwar preparing his doctoral thesis on "The Social Vision of Basvesvara."

Fr. **Albert Huart,** Lic. Phil., Lic. Theol., M.A. Oriental Studies (Oxon), born in Belgium in 1925, left for India in 1954. A professor of History and/or Political Science in St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, he became in succession Dean of the Department of Arts, then Rector of the College and Principal of the two Departments of Arts and Sciences while continuing to teach up to his retiring in 1993. He is now the Director of the Retreat House in South Calcutta.

Fr. **Peter Johanns** (1882-1955), a native of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, was ordained a Jesuit priest in Louvain on Aug. 1, 1914 (three days before the first World War broke out and Germany invaded Belgium) after studying philosophy under the prestigious metaphysician and mystic, Pierre Scheuer. Johanns' superior intelligence, nearing true genius, had been recognized and he was destined to further studies while awaiting a still impeded passage to India. He took a full licentiate in Philosophy from the University of Louvain, then was sent to Oxford as soon as the end of the war permitted it in 1919. To evaluate his doctoral dissertation on *The Agent Intellect in the Western and the Eastern Philosophies*, the Oxford University could provide no suitable examiners and had recourse to Cambridge. From there came the extraordinary verdict, "only once in a hundred years does one meet such an intellect." Oxford gave him the Doctorate degree with the highest Honours and offered him, though an R.C. and a Jesuit, a professorship. But his call was for Calcutta which he reached in Nov. 1921. He taught philosophy at St. Xavier's, at St. Mary's, Kurseong and even in a Vaiṣṇava monastery. And he studied ever more deeply the Hindu tradition. Because he always approached the real in terms of *Value*, he always felt attuned to the aims and methods of *Vedānta*. As early as October 1922, he and another Oxford graduate and Jesuit confrere, George Dandoy, started *The Light of the East*, a monthly directed to the Hindu intelligentsia as an instrument for interfaith reflection and dialogue. His contributions amounted to 216, 146 of which constitute the work. *To Christ through the Vedānta*. From his many other writings, we have selected an article, *Hinduism*, first published by the Catholic Truth Society, London. In 1938, ill health forced him to be sent back to Belgium where he nevertheless soon founded an "Indian juniorate" which, until 1955, would train young Jesuits for work in Bengal.

Fr. **Joseph Neuner**, Lic. Phil., D. Theol., born in Austria in 1908, entered India in 1938. First in De Nobili College, then in Jñana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, he fulfilled successively the functions of General Director of Studies, then Dean of the Theology Department for many years and, as Professor of Dogmatic Theology, he taught continuously up to 1985. All that time he was very active in ecumenical and interfaith encounters and he was chosen as an expert in Theology and interfaith relationships for the second Vatican Council. His numerous books and articles are concerned chiefly with religious topics of current relevance. Even in retirement, he continues to be astoundingly active. To many hundreds, he has been a clear model of zeal, openness and fidelity.

Fr. **Lancelot Pereira,** B.Sc., Lic. Phil. , Lic. Theol., was born in India in 1930 and ordained a Jesuit priest in 1961 in Bombay. In order to teach there in St. Xavier's College, he took a Ph.D. in microbiology from Cornell University. After some fifteen years of that teaching, he felt a strong need for a new Department of Life Science which he created and directed until he retired in 1992. He has recently published a book, *The Enchanted Darkness,* which embodies in a unitive framework the scientific achievements in that domain.

Fr. **George Soares-Prabhu,** (1929-1995) B.Sc., Lic. Phil., Lic. Theol., was born in 1929 and ordained a Jesuit priest in 1961. He crowned his theological studies with a doctorate in Biblical Theology. His whole teaching career has been spent in Pune. In his writings, he has contributed many thought-provoking pieces which have helped to give substance to the Indian Liberation Theology.

Fr. **Julian Bayart** (1905-1979) should also be mentioned, not only because he inspired many of our team with his love for, and understanding of all things Indian, but because he was one of the chief sponsors of this undertaking and because several of our chapters, especially, those on *Hindu Bhakti mārga* are largely indebted to the course he used to give in Kurseong.

For this revised and enlarged fourth edition, we have had the help of about two-thirds of the original contributors who, even before dying, responded to our call for improvements in their writings. The modifications for which this editor assumes the responsibility are placed between asterisks.

TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION OF SANSKRIT WORDS

(*Sound-values are shown by italic-type letters*)

a	c*u*t
ā	ca*l*m
i	bi*t*
ī	*ea*se
u	b*u*ll
u	r*ul*e
r	*ri*ch
e	t*a*ke
ai	t*i*me
o	g*o*
au	co*w*
k	*c*ut
kh	*c*urrent
g	*g*o
gh	fog*h*orn
ṅ	du*ng*
c	chur*ch*
ch	*ch*urch
j	*j*ug
jh	bri*dgeh*ill
ñ	si*ng*
ṭ	*t*ub
ṭh	*t*ooth
ḍ	*d*ust
ḍh	*th*us
ṇ	u*n*der
t	*th*rough
th	*th*istle
d	mo*th*er
dh	brea*the h*ere
n	*n*urse
p	*p*ot
ph	she*ph*erd/cam*ph*or
b	*b*oy
bh	gra*b h*im
m	*m*ud
y	*y*es
r	*r*ubber
l	*l*ove
v	a*v*ert/*w*orm
ś	*sh*ock
ṣ	*sh*ow
s	*s*ome
h	*h*oney
ḥ	u*h*
ṃ	to*ng*ue
kṣ	du*ck-sh*ot
tr	*tr*ap
jñ	bri*dge ne*w

Abbreviations in Bibliographies

Bglore : Bangalore
Bh.V.Bh : Bhāratiya Vidyā Bhavan
Bk : Book
Bk.Dep: Book Depot
B or **Bo:** Bombay
BORI: Bandharkar Oriental Research Institute
C or **Cal:** Calcutta
CISRS: Christian Institute for Study of Religion & Society
CLS: Christian Literature Society
D: Delhi
GSP: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash
ISPCK; Indian Society for Propagation of Christian Knowledge
NBCLC; National Biblical Catechetical & Liturgical Centre
M: Madras
MB: Motilal Banarsidass
MM: Munshiram Manoharlal
NY: New York
Lo: London
OUP: Oxford University Press
P: Poona/Pune or Press
PITP: Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Alwaye.
PUG: Gregorian University Press, Roma.
Ro: Roma\Rome
SBE: Sacred Books of the East
Skt: Sanskrit
U: University
UP: University Press

INTRODUCTION

A Christian Approach to Religious Hinduism

(P. Fallon)

The various studies gathered in this book were primarily meant to help Christian teachers in schools and colleges to understand and rightly appreciate the religious background of their Hindu students. This aim has amply been attained through its first three editions. Many Christian social workers in daily association with Hindu collaborators have also benefited from this book.

I—Our Approach: Scholarly and Dialogical

Avoiding controversy, writing in a dialogical spirit of respectful and sympathetic objectivity, the authors had sincerely endeavoured to present a positive understanding and appreciation of that perennial (**sanātana**), yet historically developed, religion (**dharma**) which has nourished the religious aspirations and culture of Hindu India and inspired the noblest of its sons and daughters. They had all been in contact with Hindu students as educators who considered it their duty to give them opportunity and tactful guidance to grow up as truly and personally religious believers. Especially when facing the more mature students of high schools and colleges, they had realized that they could not teach Ethics and the basic principles of spiritual life without pertinent references to the religious beliefs and practices of those students. Religious queries come so spontaneously to the seeking mind of adolescents. The practical questions, "how could I become a morally good man?" "which beliefs can give total meaning to my life?" "how can I pray and meditate to be spiritually alive?" bring them and their teachers closer and closer to the fundamental question "why?" "why should I choose this transcendent orientation?" "why should I be moral, not simply practical, spiritual and religious rather than sceptical and pragmatic?" Happy those who receive satisfactory guidance from their teachers.

Christian teachers have no authority (**adhikāra**) to *teach* Hinduism to their Hindu students but they have a duty to *help* them deepen their understanding of their ancient tradition and weigh its value in truth, holiness and universality. They have further to help them resolve the tensions that arise between these and the values of modernity, secularism and the scientific advances made in recent times.

When the teacher-student relation becomes genuine on that level, true dialogue begins which implies a readiness to learn and receive, not only to teach and give. The Christian teacher soon begins to learn religiously and spiritually from his non-Christian students once he invites them to communicate their experiences, doubts and problems. The essays offered in this book did arise from their authors' "dialogical" practice as much as from their familiarity with, and their unceasing scholarly investigation of the rich complexity of Hinduism. The dialogical attitude of the authors of Religious Hinduism has already been emulated by many Christian teachers and has also influenced even Hindu university teachers who found this book a great help for their teaching.

II—How Christians Loyal to Christ Look at Other Religions

How does a Christian believer for whom Jesus Christ is the Way to salvation look at all the other ways which men tread in search of salvation? Does he consider these religions as human strivings unaided by divine grace? Or does he think of them as channels of God's grace and ways of pilgrimage leading towards salvation? He knows that "God our Saviour wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4) and that Christ is His eternal Logos (Word), "the true Light that enlightens everyone" (John 1:9) and took flesh and suffered for the salvation of all.

Salvation is not a simply human achievement but a divine gift which raises man to divine life. No one is refused this gift except if, knowingly, guiltily, he himself rejects it. Such a rejection cannot be the case of millions of children who have died or die before reaching the age when a personal choice between good and evil is possible. As to the immense number of other human beings who could or can not reach an explicit knowledge of Christ as the universal Saviour or distinguish between a distorted and a genuine understanding of

Him, it is within their culture and normally under the influence of their inherited religion that they made or make this decisive choice.

What sort of relation then exists between Christianity and the other religions?

III—Christianity and the Other Religions of Mankind

Two definitely unchristian attitudes, though not uncommon, are to be avoided, religious indifference and religious fanaticism. Indifference results from a lack of living faith; fanaticism from a lack of respectful love for those who differ from us. The indifferent attaches little importance to the doctrines of religions, beginning with his own; he is but superficially informed about them and views all religions as equivalently irrelevant. Devoid of living faith he may accept for himself and his family a religiosity of inherited practices but praise his own tolerant agnosticism.

The fanatic, on the contrary, is aggressively intolerant of otherness. If a Christian, he condemns indiscriminately all non-Christian people and doctrines. His blind zeal prevents him from recognizing as genuine the truths and values upheld by other religions. Unlike Christ, he is unable to admire the faith and religious earnestness of people who do not share his own set of beliefs. He is a proselytizer not an evangelizer. A true Christian cannot be either indifferent or fanatic.

Now, is it not one thing to say that *individual* non-Christians can be saved within their religion through divine grace actually mediated by the incarnate Logos and another to admit that their *religions* contribute positively to their salvation and sanctification?

Historically, there have been Christian thinkers who saw an absolute discontinuity between the other religions and Christianity. Sin, they held, has so corrupted man's nature, reason and will that, short of the Christian revelation, no one can reach even a genuine knowledge of God. All non-Christian religions are false; their worship is idol-worship and there is no holiness in them nor any "evangelical preparation". If any of their followers are saved, it is not with the help of those religions but in spite of them.

This is by no means the authentic Christian doctrine but a frightfully distorted version of it. What the Church teaches is that sin has wounded and weakened man's nature but not corrupted it and that his reason can attain a certainty of the existence of God, the universal Creator and Lord. Indeed, religious thinkers and guides have taught many a precious truth about man's nature and conduct, believers everywhere know the universal commands of ethics and many have become outstanding in holiness and even mysticism. Today especially, information is widespread, and Christians have become better aware of "the marvels of God's power in all nations" and realized better that Christianity is not bound to any culture but stands at their confluent to praise and help to preserve all that is right, holy and beautiful in their religious achievements.

But there is more to be said: God's grace has never been absent from the history of man. Non-Christian religions are not the results of man's unaided quest. Their followers, under God's grace, receive from these religions within their families and religious communities the many helps they require to grow and live as truly religious men and women. It is there they learn about God's power and mercy and how to raise their souls towards Him. In their traditions they find inspiring examples and through their ceremonies, festivals and pilgrimages their devotion is fostered. For the majority of human beings it is *within and through the helps provided by their religions* that under God's grace they live as pilgrims of eternity and reach the blissful intuition of the absolute God which is the end willed by Him for all his rational creatures. *No religion in its own right and through its own power can save anyone; God alone is the universal Saviour because that intuition can only be the full revelation of His very Self granted gratuitously out of His infinite mercy.*

Through Christ the will of God which is to save all and make them partakers of his blissful life became explicit. This is the "Good News" or Gospel (*God-spel)* which he proclaimed and sanctioned through his death on a cross. God's will of universal salvation had been at work but implicit ever since the beginning of mankind. Starting with Christ's public life, it began to be clearly expressed and richly formulated into a corpus of revelation soon put down in writing. His disciples broadcast it throughout the Mediterranean world and Asia down to the Southern tip of India. Everywhere God-seekers came forward to be baptized and join the increasing body of believers, the Church. The Church, through all its members, is the herald of that explicit Good News and the Sign of its efficacy. It likes to call itself *catholic* (universal) because it is meant to spread beyond all the narrow limits of nationalities and cultures. Though ensouled by the Holy Spirit of God and Christ, it is made of weak human beings who are not free from the sins of pride, greed, selfishness and inner divisions; thus it is always in need of reforming itself in the image of its Founder. Actually, every generation brings forth its phalanx of saints marked out by their humility, unselfish generosity, commitment to truth and social justice and a love of all which reflects the depth of their love of God.

In our time, two great things have stimulated the entire Church: the ecumenical movement and the dialogical encounter with the other world religions. While the first manifests the desire of all Christians to return to the unity that had been a chief object of Christ's prayer, the second is making them better aware of the cosmic reach of Christ's grace and love as present to the world religions at every phase of their development. Through the empathy born from better knowledge and the many dialogical encounters that are taking place, Christians discover much that, beyond differences in names and forms **(nāma-rūpa)**, is already held in common by both Christian and non-Christian pilgrims of the Absolute. Christians may further discover through their readiness to listen and learn many things which shall make their Christianity more fully Christian. The emphasis placed by others on certain truths (such as non-dualism), may help them focus better on that Person who could say, "I am the Truth;" familiarity with the ways of others, (such as yoga, zen, bhakti,) already helps them follow better the one who said, "I am the Way;" fraternizing with others in their lives and religious life-styles will help them attune their life to Christ who said, "I am the Life." The Christian *Gospel* is not going to change, but the Christian *religion* will gain in catholicity because it will translate it better into all languages and cultures. Through this manifold "inculturation", it will, like the young Christ in Nazareth, "advance in age and wisdom, and in grace with God and all men."

IV—Christianity and Hinduism

It is in the light of the principles stated above that the essays which form the chapters of this book have been composed to help Christians understand Hinduism more accurately and fraternally. The religion of over half a billion Indians, Hinduism comprises a wide diversity of spiritual, theological and cultural traditions. It escapes strict definition in spite of its oneness which results from their "family resemblances". Under the title RELIGIOUS HINDUISM, we have clarified the more enduring and universal aspects of Hinduism, leaving out those of mere local interest. What appears to be popular deviation or superstitious corruption has also been left out. Jainism and Sikhism are distinct religions but have been included because of their relationship with Hinduism.

We could not offer a survey of all the philosophies of India, but Śaivism and the several schools of Vedānta constitute undoubtedly the highest intellectual achievements and the best articulated theologies of Hinduism. A succinct presentation of the great Vedāntins, beginning with Śaṅkarācārya, has been provided which adheres closely to the authentic writings of those great masters. A substantial survey of Śaivism has also been provided.

An inexhaustible abundance of ancient myths, further increased by the medieval **Purāṇas**, has sustained the religious imagination of the Hindu masses and conferred upon their daily rituals and homely activities an other-worldly dimension of pervasive religiosity. A thousand signs and symbols raise minds and hearts to the Divine, for nothing is simply profane.

Thanks to the Upanishadic **"ekam-evādvitīyam"** (One only, without a second), Hindu image-worship was never allowed to turn into idolatry, or the multiplicity of **avatāras** (creaturely forms taken by the supreme God in his "descents") to become real polytheism. On account of their incomprehension, many Christians are baffled by the numerous **pūjās** in honour of many "gods" and "goddesses" even when they perceive how much loving devotion and humble adoration the **pūjā** often expresses. **Devas** and **devīs** are many on the level of pious representation but the Bhagavān, the benign Lord, is one, whether formless (**arūpa**) or with cosmic form (**viśva-rūpa**).

The **Bhagavad-Gītā**, the **Bhāgavata-Purāṇa**, the **Rāma-Carita-Mānasa** of Tulsidas, the **Tiru-Vācakam** of Mānikka Vācakar, the hymns and prayers of innumerable **bhaktās** (devotees) have made millions of Hindus long for and surrender to the grace and love of God.

In Hindu asceticism and detachment, in the teaching of mental concentration found in the **Yoga** tradition, in the living example given by the millions of pilgrims and sanyāsins who set out in quest of God, a Christian will find an ever-new reaffirmation of the primacy of the spirit in the life of man.

In recent times, Hinduism has known many movements of reform. Revivalism on the one side, modernism on the other, together with the impact of scientism and Western culture, have somewhat altered the traits of traditional Hinduism. Great religious figures, like Śrī Rāmakrishna, Ramana Mahārshi, Rāmdās and other **Sīdhakīs**, as well as important thinkers, like Sarvepalli Rādhākrishnan and Śrī Aurobindo, inspiring religious social leaders, like Mahatma Gandhi and Swāmi Vivekānanda, have brought a new vitality to the Hindu religion.

Like the numerous users of the earlier editions of RELIGIOUS HINDUISM, the readers of this fourth and revised edition will find the help they need to understand Hinduism and be ready for a living and fraternal dialogue with their Hindu students, neighbours and co-workers. They will discover much to be admired, much also to be learnt from, when humbly listening to Christ and His Spirit speaking to them in tongues so long unfamiliar and unrecognized. In the respective conclusions of chapters, Christian readers will find brief remarks of positive criticism that may help them to recognize convergences and affinities as well as differences. These remarks are not meant to encourage controversy but to render our Hindu-Christian dialogue fully sincere and truthful.

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Chapter 1

General Historical Survey: Part I

(B.C. 1200—A.D. 700)

(P. Johanns)

I. — THE VEDIC RELIGION

A. Vedic Religion in the Four Vedas (1200—800 B.C.)

The Sources

The religion of the nomadic Aryan tribes that settled down in the Punjab more than three thousand years ago bears a double aspect. There was the higher religion, that of the priest and warrior class, and the lower religion, that of the common people. We are well informed about the higher form of belief since we possess the prayer book (*Rig-Veda),* the song-book (*Sāma-Veda),* and the ritual (*Yajur-Veda),* which were used at the sacrifice. From the *Atharva-veda,* or the book of sacred spells, we gain a somewhat blurred view of the more animistic and magical beliefs of the lower strata of populations. In the course of its evolution the higher religion will be continuously influenced for better and for worse by the beliefs and religious practices of the popular religion, and these innovations appear as so many compromises of the official religion with popular cult and belief.

Polytheism

The Vedic gods are not unlike those of the Greek Pantheon, but they lack the beautiful hierarchy and finish of the Hellenic nature-deities. They are still in the making, and hover indecisively between the nature element wherewith several are still indentified (sun, moon, rain, wind, etc.), and their personal existence on a plane of their own. What discriminates them still more from the Greek gods is their close connection with the sacrifice.

Indra and Agni own a relative supremacy because they claim the lion's share in the hymns addressed to the gods at the sacrifice. They were undoubtedly the favourite gods in the Vedic times, and the reason is not far to seek. For Indra was the prototype of the Vedic warrior on whose behalf the sacrifice was offered, and Agni that of the priest who was the minister of the sacrifice. Quaffing pools of the intoxicating soma-drink, Indra assailed Vritra, the demon of drought, slew him, and liberated the cows (the rain-waters) that brought the food for men and cattle. At the same time he was the regent of the sky and displayed his war-like temper during the storm, hurling his thunderbolts at Vritra till the clouds broke and yielded the much desired monsoon-rain. Later on he became the ruling deity of the paradise of the gods.

Agni was the deification of fire. He was the god who, on the altar, burned the sacrificial gifts and wafted them on to the gods. Hence he was considered as the priest amongst the gods, the mediator between men and gods. Moreover he lived in the sacrificial flame of the ever-burning household fire and belonged to the family.

Next in importance, on account of the number of hymns which were addressed to him, stands Soma, the deification of the sacrificial beverage. It was Soma who, when drunk by the gods and the worshippers, roused the energies of the gods and conferred immortality upon the worshippers. Popular fancy identified him with the moon.

There were, however, many other gods and godlings, gods of the upper sky, of the middle air, and of earth (their official number is thirty-three). Rivers, pools and sacrificial implements were also deified.

The Cult

The Vedic worshipper did not use temples and idols. The priests selected a spot near the house of the sacrificer, spread the sacrificial straw on which the gods sat down, laid out the flesh of slaughtered animals and set out in bowls the sacred soma-drink. The gods were supposed to partake of the food and drink. Sacrificial fires were lit, in which milk, butter, and rice-cakes were thrown and wafted to the gods on the wreaths of the smoke. During the sacrifices, hymns to the gods were recited and sung, accompanied with the muttering of the sacrificial formulas by the officiating priest.

It has been said that the Vedic gods were rather profane gods. There is, however, one God-like feature which is theirs. They like to give and surrender to the man who surrenders to them. The self-communicating character of Goodness is acknowledged in the gods, and this is a most fundamental character of divine Holiness. We must, however, acknowledge that righteousness, as we understand it, is not usually ascribed to the gods. With one exception, however:-

Varuna

The Vedic worshippers had a clear idea of universal order. It was called Rita, (Ṛta) and stood for moral and cosmological order. Varuna the god, who later on became the Indian Neptune, was in Vedic times considered as the promoter of Rita, and therefore by essence a righteous god. He was supposed to watch by himself, or through his spies, the observance of the universal Law, and to punish its transgressors with dropsy and other evils. Varuna was a god older than the Veda. He appears in the Zend-Avesta as Ahura Mazdan (Sanskrit: *Asura* Mahān*)*, and is the supreme God of a strong ethical theism. In the Vedas, however, he failed to reach supremacy and seems to have been ousted by the more profane gods, with Indra at their head.

B. Vedic Religion in the laterportions of the Vedas and in the Brāhmaṇas (800—700 B.C.)

The Downfall of the Gods

In the later portions of the Vedas and in the Brāhmaṇas, which were new documents that set forth the sacrificial prescriptions (*vidhi*) together with their explanations (*artha-vāda*), the gods begin to lose their importance. A new conception of the sacrifice tends to shift the divine character from the gods to the priest who, as yet, had only been their minister. It is said that religion consists in the realization of one's dependence on higher powers. Here we meet with a religious tendency which consists in the realization of the dependence of the higher powers on an absolute power which the worshipper has at its command. In the early times the sacrifice brought results by the favour of the god. The causality expected to work was moral. But now the causality of the sacrifice is considered as physical, even as absolute. It compels the gods to accede to the desires of the sacrificer. Nay, the gods themselves must sacrifice to bring about their wishes. The gods even tend to become mere names, which are only important because their invocation is an essential part of the sacrifice. Such a conception looks like magic on a grand scale. Sacrifice, like Rita, is able to shape the world of gods and men. It has become the power that directs all things in heaven and on earth. The priest is the brain behind this power. He alone knows how to wield it and make it yield all its beneficent results.

The Caste-system

There was no *caste-system* in the early times. There were three classes, the priests, the warriors and the settlers. But during this period the Vedic tribes had advanced towards the region that lies between the Ganges and the Yamuna, and had subjected on their way the aboriginal tribes. Now the caste-system, which restricts social intercourse and inter-marriage amongst the various classes, was felt as a necessity to keep the Aryan stock pure from non-Aryan admixture. A part of the subjected tribes was admitted as servants into the Vedic community, and the rest was pushed into the jungles. The servants became the Śūdra-caste and the rejected groups the outcastes. The former classes in their turn became each a new caste. The highest caste was that of the priest, then that of the warrior, and lastly that of the settler. These were the upper castes who underwent initiation and, on this account, were called the "twice-born". The servants belonged to the low caste, and the people who were not received within the fold were called outcastes.

But the *brāhmaṇa*, or priest, stood above them all in his divine dignity. It was said that the priest originated from the head of Brahman, the warrior from his arms, the settler from his legs, and the servants from his feet. The outcastes apparently originated from nowhere.

Caste is a most important element in Hindu religion, the duties of caste being, besides the sacrificial duties, the most essential element of righteousness.

Brahman

But another circumstance hastened the downfall of the gods. We have alluded already to their lack of individuality. They had the tendency to shade over into one another and to interchange their attributes. Moreover there seems to be a theistic tendency in prayer. The Vedic priest-singer, when praising one god, treats him practically as if he were the supreme god, and the other gods come in to lend him their own attributes to enhance his greatness (Henotheism). But all these confusing processes tended to make the gods appear as so many forms of the All-God or so many forms of the All-power. The Absolute had arisen at last, but it looked rather like a common image than a clear-cut concept. It was called *Brahman* and considered as the holy power that underlay the world of gods and men, and manifested itself in the potency of the sacrificial prayer called *brahman* and of the sacrificial rite. The priest again was supposed to participate in this power, and became a *brāhmana*, a possessor of Brahma-nature.

C. The Vedic Religion in the Āraṇyakas (about 700 B.C.)

The Mystics of the Forest

The new vista on the Absolute proved a potent stimulus to a deeper religious life. It gave room to rational speculation and mystic contemplation. With the Āraṇyakas, the books of the Forest-dwellers (*vanaprasthas),* we are introduced into the belief and practice of the Indian hermit, the forerunner of the modern yogin. The yogin in general did not belong to the higher castes. Withdrawing into the solitude of the forest, he was intent on isolated self-realization. His aim was to acquire supernatural powers by excessive awe-inspiring mortifications. At the same time he practised mental concentration, and in his hypnotic trances came to realize his absorption into the abstraction of sheer absoluteness. The mortification which he practised was called *tapas*, and it came to be considered as an absolute power, like the sacrifice. Even Prajāpati, the Lord of creatures, had to acquire his creative power by aeon-long self-torture. So afraid were the gods of this mysterious power that they tried to check the superhuman exertions of the hermit by sending *apsarās,* or heavenly women, to lure the yogins back to self-indulgence.

The official religion, of course, considered the hermit as a rival who opposed the all-powerful efficacity of *tapas* to that of the sacrifice. Brahmanism, however, soon discovered a compromise. There were so far two stages of life, that of the student, who, in his youth, studied the sacrificial lore in a Vedic school, and that of the householder. A third stage was now acknowledged, that of the Forest-dweller, or hermit. Moreover, provision was made to make sacrifice possible to the hermit. In the *Āraṇyakas* we meet with an allegorical and symbolical explanation of the sacrifice, which enables the hermit to perform mentally his sacrificial duties.

D. Vedic Religion in the Upaniṣads (650—400 B.C.)

The Transition

But it looks as if this device to win over the contemplative of the jungle did not suffice to counteract the dissolving influence of thought that asserted its rights in the mental concentration of the hermit. For we notice that in the subsequent documents, the Upaniṣads, Brahman, the Absolute, casts off more and more his sacerdotal trappings and tends to emerge in its metaphysical purity. But to understand this new orientation we must at first state the problem to which the Upaniṣads sought and thought that they found a solution.

Transmigration and Karma

The eschatology of the Vedas was simple. The worshippers of the gods passed after their death into the blessed abode of the forefathers (*pitris*), where they lived happily in the home of Vishnu under the rule of Yama, the first man who ever was born and died. For the wicked a kind of Hades was prepared. But already in the Brāhmaṇas the thought crops up that possibly man might die again after the next life, and perhaps not only once but again and again. This perspective of repeated deaths filled the heart of the worshipper with awe, and heartfelt prayers are addressed to the deity to avert such an occurrence.

Possibly we meet here with a prelude to the transmigtration doctrine. At any rate, in the Upaniṣads the theory is worked out and brought into connection with moral requital. At death, so the theory ran, man according to the deserts of his previous lives rises to the plane of the gods or falls down to that of animals or plants. The caste-system brought in a further differentiation. If the soul was reborn as man it became, according to its moral character, either a brāhmin, a warrior, a settler, a servant, or an outcaste. This new theory modified to the root the religious outlook, and brought in a problem for which the official religion had no answer.

The alternation of life and death, according to the law of the Deed (*karma),* filled man with awe of his own responsibility. As he had sown in his previous lives, thus he reaped in the present and future lives. His self-made character had to work itself out in pleasure and pain. The need arose then to transcend this plane of eternal vicissitudes directed by the Deed. Release from transmigration and karma became the great obsession of the more reflective minds.

The conception of an absolute plane transcending the sphere of change already existed. Brahman, the Absolute, was supposed to repose in its absolute indetermination of mere Being identical with mere Awareness. But how could the soul ascend to this plane? The soul was the *ātman,* or self, which was supposed to be irretrievably enmeshed in the web of the Deed. Religion offered wealth and pleasure in exchange for the performance of the sacrificial duties, of the duties of caste and stages of life. But what could even religious *karma* avail, since it had to work itself out in pleasure which required a new embodiment, and thus made release impossible?

The cry of deliverance arose from the forest. The self has not to ascend to the plane of Brahman, the self is indwelled by Brahman whole and undivided. *Thou art that! Thou,* the individual soul, *art That,* contained within Him, Your absolute illumining Intelligence.

This sudden revelation roused an indescribable enthusiasm, and the new theory of release was discussed at the courts of the kings as in the solitude of the forests. The Upaniṣads have preserved these discussions, and thus offer to us both the striking intuitions of the monks who wandered out from the forest and propagated the theory of release everywhere, and the questions or conclusions of wise Kings.

How did the official religion accept the new theory, which seemed to deal a death-blow to religion in general? Sacrifices were of no use for man who felt himself at one with the absolute Light-ether of Brahman, absorbed and immersed in its indeterminate Awareness.

The official religion made a new compromise. A fourth stage of life was introduced, that of the *saṅnyāsin,* or the wandering monk, and for his needs the Upaniṣads were introduced into the curriculum of the Vedic School as the end-part of Veda, the *Vedānta*. Moreover, a fourth "end of man" *(puruṣartha)* was devised, that of *mukti*, or release, so that for those who were not satisfied with acquiring wealth, pleasure, and religious merit, there was release as an aim of life. This, however, was reserved to the *sannyāsin,* or wandering monk.

II. TRANSITION FROM VEDIC TIMES TO SECTARIAN RELIGIONS (600—200 B.C.)

Law Books

The doctrine of release taught by the Upaniṣads hardly influenced the religion of the ordinary twice-born. The wandering monk might repose in Brahma-bliss, but the student and the householder had to see to the things of this earth. They faithfully clung to the gods, who rewarded their service with protection and material prosperity. Hence we notice that after the Upaniṣads a new codification of the rules of religious conduct arose, the so-called *sūtras*. The *Śrauta-sūtras* deal with the great sacrifices, the *Grihya-sūtras* with the minor sacrifices on the household fire, and the *Dharma-sūtras* with social and political law and customs.

From the religious standpoint, the *Grihya* — or *household* — *sūtras* are most interesting. They introduce us to the religious cult as it was practised in the homes of the twice-born. They are not only daily sacrifices to the gods (*deva-yajña)* on the sacrificial fire which the householder kept burning all the time, but sacrifices to the spirits by depositing food for them in various places *(bhūta-yajña)*, sacrifices to the ancestors, who had to be fed *(pitri-yajña)*, the Brahma-sacrifice or the reading of some sacred text *(Brahma-yajña)*, the sacrifice to the guests or the sacrifice of hospitality *(manushya-yajña)*. There was also the daily twilight-devotion (*sandhyā*) or the morning and evening prayers.

Besides these daily devotions there were the New and Full-Moon sacrifices, and a whole round of rites and sacraments that were intended to render auspicious the important moments of life. The sacraments or rites were eighteen in number. We mention the principal ones. There was a sacrament (samskāra) to secure the birth of a son, which was the essential obligation of the householder; a sacrament by which the hair of the pregnant woman was parted; a birth-rite, a rite of cutting the hair leaving a lock in the middle; a rite of cutting the hair and shaving the beard of the young man; also the great rite of investiture with the sacred thread whereby the young man became a twice-born and fit to study the scriptures; the rite at the beginning and close of studentship; the rite of marriage, etc. Lastly, there were the funeral ceremonies. After the death of a man, his ghost roamed about and had to be fed till, by a rite of *sapinda-karana,* it was united with the fore-fathers.

Thus the Vedic household-ritual is still nowadays considered as a sign of Vedic orthodoxy. The later temple and image cult of the sectarian religions cannot claim a Vedic origin. It is true that the sūtras begin to mention this cult, but it is not recommended. The cult existed, but apparently it had not as yet received brahmanical sanction. Moreover, there is no trace in the *Sūtras* of the later Theism which acknowledges one supreme God. All the gods are acknowledged and even a few new deities appear on the stage. The so-called Smārtas are right when they maintain that it is unvedic to worship one supreme God. All the gods must be honoured. One may worship a favourite god but not a supreme God.

III. THE SECTARIAN RELIGIONS
(200 B.C.—500 A.D.)

The Sources

From the early times (600 B.C.) we can trace the formation of two Epics. One is called the *Mahābhārata*, and depicts the heroic adventures of the sons of Pandu and Kuru, and the other the *Rāmāyana,* which relates the adventures of *Rāma.*

The Epics are not religious books by themselves. But there came a time (300 B.C.) when two sects, the Vaishṇavites and the Śaivites, used them to propagate their doctrine amongst the common people. Scholars distinguish therefore between the older epics strata and the younger sectarian portions. At a certain moment the *Mahābhārata* thus became an encyclopaedia of religious, moral and political doctrines. This portion is called the didactic Epic, and contains the most important book of Hindu religion, the *Bhagavad-Gītā.*

The Purāṇas

The Purāṇas again are not religious books. They contain the stories of creation and re-creation, the genealogies of kings, the descriptions of the earth, of the world-periods and their various regents, etc. But once more the Vaishṇavites and the Śaivites used them for purposes of religious propaganda by interpolating them with their mythology. The early Purāṇas date from the fourth century A.D. But there were earlier Purāṇas and some of their material must have penetrated into the actual Purāṇas. The Purāṇas grew continually by interpolation.

The New Religion

In these books religion takes a new orientation in belief, cult and the way of salvation. Polytheism at last is overcome. It remains, however, as a subordinate aspect of the new Theism. Theism consists in the acknowledgment of but one supreme God. In the Epics and Purāṇas, Vishnu and Śiva are considered by their respective worshippers as one with the Brahman of the Upaniṣads. This identification shows that we have now to deal with a God who, as Brahman, is absolute and, as either Vishnu or Śiva, is an individual. Brahman gives to Vishnu and Śiva what they needed, absoluteness and supremacy. Their nature becomes one with absolute Being, absolute Awareness, and absolute Bliss. But Śiva and Vishnu also give to Brahman what it lacked so utterly, namely, individuality. God is now conceived as a spiritual subject endowed with attributes, able to enter with the souls into relations of fellowship. But there is one most unwelcome feature. The supreme Spirit is supposed to exist on His own plane in a human form or, to express it more pithily, God is supposed to own a body by which He is individualized.

The way of release is conceived differently. The individualized God naturally invites to personal intercourse with Him. The God that appeals to the heart has arisen, and it will henceforth be said that loving service of God (*bhakti)* is the means to lead us back to the divine plane from which our *karma* keeps us estranged.

The cult also takes a different orientation. The presence of God is already sought in this world, and He is supposed to reside in His image. Hence the image cult becomes prominent.

Vishnu

In the Vedas, Vishnu was but a subordinate deity. He was the representative of the sun on its journey through space. But he had the good fortune to become closely identified with the sacrifice. This identification enabled him to stride out towards supremacy and become the gigantic supreme God that he remains to this day. In one of his cosmic manifestations Vishnu is identified with the *guṇa sattva.* This characterizes his nature to a nicety, for *sattva* expresses nature's impulse to ideality, to preservation, progress, and salvation. Vishnu was really the gracious God and the saviour God. We must not therefore be astonished that he becomes the God of *bhakti* or love-service.

The Avatārs

The theory of the *avatārs* is un-vedic. We may say, however, that the Vedic conception of God as the Absolute, which revealed itself in many forms, brought the conception of the *avatārs* quite close to the religious conscience. The *avatārs* are not "incarnations" of the supreme God. God already owns the human form on His plane. It belongs to His essence, but He *descends* to manifest himself in some visible form which may be human or infra-human.

The reason why Vishnu descends is in conformity with his character. He wishes to save humanity from some physical or moral cataclysm. To save the righteous people and to destroy all the enemies of the gods and men is his aim in appearing on earth.

The Trimūrti

Vishnu reveals himself in three subordinate forms. He is the supreme God, but in order to create the world he appears as Brahma; in order to preserve the world as Vishnu (a subordinate form of the supreme Vishnu), and in order to destroy as Śiva. In the Purāṇas, Brahma becomes the controller of the "guṇa" *rajas,* which is the evolving principle of unconscious nature, Vishnu the controller of the "guṇa" *sattva*, which is the principle of preservation and liberation, and Śiva the controller of the "guṇa" *tamas*, which is the dissolving principle. The attempt to bring the *Trimūrti,* into connection with the conception of the Christian Trinity is futile. For in Vaishṇavism there are four gods: the one supreme and the four subordinate gods. Besides, the meaning of the subordinate gods is entirely cosmical.

Bhagavān

Vishnu is called Bhagavān, and the Purāṇas explain that he possesses six glorious bhāgās or attributes: *aiśvarya* or lordly power, *vīrya* or miraculous power, *yaśas* or glory, *śrī* or splendour, *jñāna* or unrestricted knowledge, *vairāgya* or unfettered liberty.

Krishna

Krishna is enumerated in the list of avatars of Vishnu. Who is this Krishna? In the Mahābhārata he is the hero who helps the five sons of Pandu to their victory. Some think that Krishna was a vegetation spirit; others that he was a solar deity; others that he was a demi-god. But the fact is that in the Bhagavad-Gītā he emerges as the supreme God identical with Vishnu, Brahman, and Bhagavân, and to our days he is the favourite god of an important section of Vaishṇavites.

The Bhagavad-Gītā

The Bhagavad-Gītā first identifies Krishna with Vishnu and Brahman. Krishna thus becomes the supreme God. But the new God has a new revelation. He points to the three ways of salvation — the way of work, the way of knowledge, and the way of love-service — as leading to release, and declares that the way of love-service surpasses them all. The most important innovation, however, is the rehabilitation of the *karma*-way. We pointed out in the previous pages that *karma* (activity) by producing religious merits required rebirth: its pleasant results had to work themselves out. Hence, far from extricating the soul from rebirth, it kept it ensnared in the meshes from which it tried to escape. The result was that only the sannyāsin, who gave up *karma,* could reach out towards release.

But the man of the world could not give up work. How could a warrior, like Arjuna, renounce fighting and yet live up to the duties of his caste? Krishna therefore declares that *karma* should not be renounced when it is our duty. He denies that *karma* by its very nature binds to the *samsāra.* It is not *karma* but the selfish intent to secure pleasure by its performance which made *karma* a principle of rebirth. If we give up this selfish intent, *karma*, far from binding our soul to the law of rebirth, purifies it and prepares our final release.

By this new revelation the way of release was opened to the layman. In the subsequent theologies the *karma*-way will be recommended as the way of purification which leads up to the way of illumination or the *jñāna-mārga,* and ends in the way of union or the *bhakti-mārga.* Thus, with the Gītā we reach the systematization of the different ways of release. It is also in keeping with this doctrine that the Gītā admits the low-casteman, the *sūdra*, within the fold of the true religion, and allows him to press on towards release by the performance of the duties of his caste and by love-service. The outcastes, however, are still debarred from all the three ways.

The Young Krishna

The Mahābhārata depicts the hero Krishna. But the *Harivamsa*, the *Vishnu Purāṇa*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, concentrate their devotion on the child, the boy and the youth Krishna. Whilst the Epic only alludes to this period of the god's life, the Purāṇas make it their almost exclusive subject-matter. We shall notice later on that the young Krishna will become the object of a special form of *bhakti*.

The Pañcarātra

In the *Nārāyaṇiya* section of the didactic Epic we meet with another form of Vaishṇavism. Krishna or Vāsudeva is conceived as appearing in three subordinate forms, the so-called *vyūhas*. Mythologically, the first form of Vāsudeva is Krishna himself. The second is Baladeva, the half-brother of Krishna, and bears the name Sankarshana. The third is Pradyumna, a son of Krishna from Rukmini. The fourth is Aniruddha, a grandson of Krishna.

Śaivism

The Śaivite sect, like the Vaishṇavite sect, uses the Epics and the Purānas as vehicles of propaganda. Śiva, like Vishnu, is identified with Brahman, and proposed as the goal of the *bhakti-mārga.* His cult also centres around the idol and the temple.

Śiva

In his subordinate form in the *Trimūrti*, Śiva is brought into connection with the "guna" *tamas.* This "guna", which is a principle of dissolution and disorder, brings out an important aspect of the god. Śiva is the personification of the dangerous impulse of Nature which, through the phases of disorder and dissolution, carries on the never-ending stream of life which rejuvenates itself in its decay and from the ruins of death ascends to a higher form of itself.

Magasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta (300 B.C.), identified Śiva with Dionysius. Śiva indeed already in the Vedic times was a dangerous storm-god. Mythology depicts him as living in the Himalayas with his companion in wild revelry. He wears a tiger-skin and a garland of snakes around his neck, and on his forehead burns a third eye. Being the god of death, he likes to haunt the graveyards and the burning ghâts with his band, giving expression to his joy by wild laughter and crazy dancing. On the other hand, the phallus, too, is his symbol, and he is also considered as the god of life. All forms, it is said, come from him, since he stands for the universal principle of generation. He is even identified with *Hiraṇyagarbha*, the first germ of all things.

This wild god who symbolizes the instinct of life unchecked by any moral consideration is, on the other hand, the first of the yogins. He is depicted as buried in his millennial reveries and burning with the fire of his third eye the god *Kāma* (Lust) who approaches him to lure him back to self-indulgence.

Well may the reader ask himself how such a god could become the object of devoted self-service. But his mythology depicts him as a god always ready to save. He has not the bright ideal features of Vishnu, but in him the human instinct with all its mysterious excesses finds a justification and a divine consecration. This character of stupendous vitality proved attractive. We must not forget also that the identification with Brahman throws the halo of absoluteness around this vitality.

IV. THE SUPREMACY OF THE GODDESS (500 A.D.)

The Sources

Towards the beginning of the sixth century a new literature appears, that of the *Tantras*, which deal foremost with the making of images and temples. At the same time they set forth the theology, the Yoga, and the religious practices of the sect. The new sect of the *Tantrikas*, or the Śaktas, must have arisen from Śaivism, since it raises Durgā, the wife of Śiva, to the state of supremacy.

The Cult of the Goddess

Tantrism, or Śaktism, considers the cult of the goddess more important than the cult of the god. The goddess, however, is identified with Śiva the god, and in so far as she is distinguishable from him she represents the active and immanent side of God, whereas he stands for the passive and transcendent side. The goddess is the power *(śakti)* whereas the god is but its mere support. Without his *Śakti* Śiva is a corpse. His *śakti* is the vital principle of himself and of the world. It is therefore from the goddess that all things arise, and, what is most important for the religious consciousness, it is from her that originate the bondage and the release of the soul. Her most enticing aspect is that she is the principle of grace, the principle that illumines the souls, sanctifies them, and brings them back to union with God. Thus she is acknowledged as the mother of our spiritual life.

Durgā

Durgā appears on the scene in the Mahābhārata as the sister of Krishna. She lives in the Vindhya Mountains as the virgin who sustains heaven and earth by her chastity. The mountain dwellers honour her with wine and meat-offering, which is still now a feature of her cult. Perhaps here we meet with the first formation of the goddess-cult amongst the wild tribes of the Vindhyas. Other scholars, however, think that her cult arose from the religious practices of some degraded matriarchal tribes of the north. At any rate, the readiness of śaktism to open its fold to the outcastes proves that it originated from the lower orders, which explains also the cult beliefs and magical practices proper to this sect. In later portions of the Mahābhārata the goddess ceases to be a virgin, and becomes the wife of Śiva. Moreover, she takes over from her husband many of his attributes and becomes in all the female counterpart of the terrible god. She is the goddess of death and, at the same time, symbolizes the unchecked vitality of nature, which rejuvenates itself in its own decay and destruction. This is the dance of Kālī, or Durgā, that she ascends from the destruction of herself in a lower form to a higher form.

In the Chandī, a section of the Markandeya Purāṇa, she is identified with Brahman, and depicted as the great saviour-goddess in her heroic fights with the demons, the enemies of the gods and men. Well does she deserve the name of Bhairavī, the Terrible. For she slays her enemies, severs their heads from their trunks, drinks their blood, and dances in wild intoxication. And yet there are so many appealing legends woven around her name that her mention brings tears to the eyes of her devotees. But her most enticing character is her being the mother, and as such she may be the mother of the country, one's own mother and the mother of the world, but before all the mother of liberation and of eternal life. In Durgā the Indians have embodied the ideal of the mother, which explains her being Devī, *the* Goddess.

Occultism in Her Cult

The Indians have conceived the goddess as a goddess of complete surrender. She seems to be only for herself in so far as she is for the souls.

For the Devī has passed over whole and undivided into the mantric prayers addressed to her. Her power is latent in the words of the mantras, and their utterance is by itself a display of this power. It is even said that the five mantras constitute her body. Here we meet again with the same tendency which has identified sacrifice and asceticism with the absolute power. But in the present case the absolute power latent in the mantras is no longer an occult power, it is the power of the personal God. The question therefore comes to this: Does God surrender to prayer so as to put at the disposal of the devotee all His power whole and undivided? If we put the question in this way we understand at once that we have to deal with an exaggeration. The moral causality of prayer which is strong enough to bring about a wholesale surrender of God is conceived by the *śāktas* as a power working by its own *physical* causality. We must add, however, that the mantras work in this way only when the devotee is wholly surrendered to the goddess and has passed through the way of purification, illumination, and unity, and identified himself by this wholesale surrender with the Mother of grace. "I am she", says the devotee, which means before all "I am only by her, in her, and for her". There is, of course, the danger that the mantric prayer in unqualified persons becomes a mere formalism, and is supposed to work like a sacred spell.

The Yoga of the Sect

The classical Yoga, as described in the sūtras of Patañjali, is foremost a moral and mental discipline meant to bring about the inhibition of our world consciousness, opening on the material world and its painful vicissitudes, in order to withdraw our mental light within itself. Śaktism has a Yoga of its own. It starts from the supposition that the goddess has passed whole and undivided in all her effects, and hence must be immanent in the human body. The body is considered as a temple of the goddess. The śāktas believe in the existence of occult threads and circles in the human frame. In the lowest circle the goddess lies asleep coiled in the form of a snake around the linga. By mental concentration she is awakened and led along the various circles, where she displays her powers till she reaches the highest circle, where release takes place. She is called in this form Kuṇḍalinī, the coiled one, and the Yoga is known as Kuṇḍalinī Yoga. It is accompanied by various postures, breath-regulation, by ceremonial motions with the fingers and the hands, by recitation of the mantras, by monosyllabic exclamations, etc.

Magic

As the cult originates from the lower orders, magic in all its forms, white, black, and sympathetic, is most conspicuous in it, and surpasses all that can be found in the Atharva-veda. Śaktism seems to have been at first a mere mythological belief associated with magic. It was transfigured somehow when the more reflective minds brought in metaphysics, and identified the goddess with the divine power, and introduced the various ways of self-realisation proper to the Vedānta and the cosmology of the Sānkhya. A last reform took place when the Right-Hand movement arose, which explained all the objectionable features allegorically.

As the Āgamas and the Saṁhitās show, many elements of Śaktism passed over into Vaishṇavism and Śaivism, and Sarasvatī, Lakshmī, and other goddesses arose also to the supreme place. Buddhism developed all the unethical features of śaktism, and its disappearance from India is due to the corruption it underwent by it having swallowed too much of this poison. Śāktism in a milder form reappears in Krishnaism, where Rādhā, the wife or mistress of Krishna and the principal milkmaid *(gopī)*, is considered as the śakti of the Lord and the Mother of grace and liberation.

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Chapter 2

General Historical Survey: Part II

(A.D. 700-1600)

(*P. Johanns*)

V. THE GREAT INDIAN THEOLOGIES

The account given in the preceding pages informs us about the essentials of Hinduism. But the reader must have asked himself if it is possible to bring consistency within all the conflicting statements of the religious development which we have recorded. Fortunately some great theological geniuses have arisen from the eighth century onwards, who have set themselves the task to systematize the confused mass of religious lore accumulating from the time of the Vedas.

The Common Features of Indian Theology

What is called the Vedānta Philosophy is not properly a Philosophy but a Scriptural Theology. For the different assertions are proved by scriptural and traditional arguments, and reason is only admitted in so far as it confirms Scripture and Tradition. The usual way of theologising consists in writing a commentary on the Brahma-sūtras of Bādarāyana, which are short aphorisms, explaining the doctrine of the Upaniṣads.

Inspiration of Scripture

Scripture is supposed to be the verbal embodiment of God. Brahman from the beginning breathed it forth, and the rishis or sacred seers heard or saw it, but they were mere instruments in promulgating the sacred lore. Scripture, that is the Vedas down to the Upaniṣads, is the word of God where nothing human comes in.

The Epics and the Purāṇas are supposed to elucidate and amplify the Vedic lore. The Theology of the Vedānta is based on fideism, since the belief in scripture has not to be justified rationally, and since it is admitted that, if reason contradicts scripture, scripture prevails.

Karma and Rebirth

All the theologies admit that there are an infinite number of souls, which are pure spirits but enmeshed in material nature on account of their past deeds. According to the Law of the Deed, these souls pass from one body to another, and are unable by themselves to extricate themselves from the *saṁsāra,* that is, from their eternal wandering.

Liberation

All theologians admit also that the grace of God has to come in to deliver the souls. But this work is difficult. It spreads over aeons of lives, and it follows in a general way three gradations. These souls have to pass through a phase of purification *(karma-yoga),* through a phase of illumination *(jnāna-yoga)*, and a phase of loving surrender *(bhakti-yoga)*, till at the end they reach a certain union with God. These ways are differently conceived in the different systems.

The Absence of Creatio ex nihilo

No Vedāntic theology admits *creatio ex nihilo.* The usual conception is that of immanent creation. God is supposed to be the material cause of the world, and therefore to pass into the world in one way or another.

De Smet's editorial note:-

Creation.—All Vedāntins hold that Brahman is not only the intelligent cause of the structure and order of the world but also its **upādāna,** a word often translated as "material cause" because its stock example is the lump of clay out of which jars are made through a change (**parināma**) of its shape. Actually, it means the "reality-giving cause", i.e., the "substantive cause". Most Vedāntins understand the above terms according to that stock example and hold that Brahman is the material cause which through a self-transformation passes in some way or other into the world it creates.

Śaṅkara, however, while using those same terms, explains that creation, even as **parināma**, implies no change in Brahman for Brahman is absolutely unchangeable. Late Śaṅkarians, however, thought they had to deny altogether the meaning of **parināma** (change) and say that the creation was illusory. Their opinion has become the current interpretation of Śaṅkara which is as follows:

1. ŚAṄKARA (700-750)

The Fundamental Idea

The seers of the Upaniṣads had discovered that man is one with Brahman, the Absolute, whole and undivided. If man becomes aware of his absorption in absoluteness, he is liberated and one with the absolute self-subsistent Light. Śaṅkara worked out this idea into a system.

God

Śaṅkara maintains that God is beyond all attributes. He has no relations, and hence transcends that of substance and attributes as well. So, we know that God is? The answer is that God is the absolute *That,* or Being. Do we know what God is? The answer is that God is the absolute *What,* the absolute intelligibility in act or the absolute Awareness. God is therefore the absolute self-subsistent Light of awareness. Śaṅkara has reached a true notion of God in His absoluteness and transcendency.

The World

Śaṅkara is an acosmist. The world, that is, nature and souls, exist and are real only in so far as they are contained in God, absorbed in His absoluteness. There is therefore no world outside God, or in itself. But Śaṅkara cannot deny its appearance. The world as it is supposed to exist in itself is an illusion. But this illusion is all-enveloping. If the world is an illusion, it is an illusion that is correlated to God, and hence the omnipotence, the omniscience, and the all-pervasiveness of God is an illusion. All the world-attributes of God are illusions or superimpositions, and we must abstract them from God. But how to explain this illusion? The transcendent God is connected *as it were* with a principle of illusion *(māyā),* on account of which, although unrelated, He appears as correlated with the world, which appears to exist in itself. To realize the range of *māyā* let the reader consider the participability of God as the foundation of *māyā,* or as *māyā* itself. All reality that is supposed to participate in God is *māyā,* the true reality of the world being absorbed in God.

Practical Theology

Śaṅkara admits the *karma*-way and the *jñāna*-way. *Karma*, which means the performance of all that scripture imposes of the sacrifices, the sacraments, the duties of caste and stages of life, leads to prosperity in this life and to exaltation in the next. But these religious duties do not bring about liberation. However, when *karma* is practised unselfishly, without aiming at pleasure, it is a prerequisite for liberation. When one has practised unselfishly religious duties for countless aeons, one is qualified for the *jñāna*-way. The way of *jñāna*, or knowledge, consists in realizing one's identity with God, and by so doing one transcends the plane of *samsāra*, or of rebirth, and reposes forever in the bliss of divine absorption.

Śaṅkara's Influence

The system of Śaṅkara is meant for the *sannyāsin,* that is, for the wandering monk who has broken all ties with the world. The man in the world, the householder, is not meant to live up to the theory of Śaṅkara. He must go on believing in God and in the gods as they are set forth in the Vedas, the Epics, and the Purāṇas, for he is intent on securing wealth, pleasure, and religious merit, and, if he reaches out for salvation, he is told to practise unselfish *karma*. Hence the orthodox householders, the *smārtās,* do not find any objection to the position of Śaṅkara. They abstract from the nature of the absolute as it impresses the *sannyāsin* in his mystical trance, and stick to the traditional Vedic lore. Śaṅkara had a far-reaching influence, as we may gather from the existence of ten different religious orders who claim him as their patron. They are called the Dasnāmis.

2. *RĀMĀNUJA (1050-1137)*

Rāmānuja was a brahmin of the south, who started with accepting the theory of Śaṅkara as taught in his time. But he was won over by the Śrī-Vaishṇavites, who had their headquarters in the temple and school of Śrīrangam, in Tiruchirapalli. He is the first theologian of the Vaishṇavites, who wrote a commentary on the Brahma-sūtra to vindicate the orthodoxy of the sect. He became one of the pontiffs of the sect and journeyed all through India to propagate Vaishṇavism.

His Fundamental Conception (Viśiṣṭa-advaita)

There are three reals, God, nature, and the souls, but there is but one Reality, for God, the fundamental Reality, is differentiated (viśiṣṭa) by nature and the souls, who are the modes of His substance. This system is called non-dualism of the qualified Brahman because it teaches that God is qualified by souls and nature, and there exists nothing outside the qualified God.

God

Rāmānuja does not understand the meaning of the transcendent Absolute as taught by Śaṅkara. According to him a God without auspicious attributes is an impossibility. God must be a substance and have an infinite number of infinite attributes. Moreover, God cannot be mere self-subsistent knowledge. If he has to be more than an abstraction, He must be a knowing subject, a person.

The Forms of God

God has, on His own plane, a human form or a spiritual body, made of *viśuddha sattva,* or spiritual matter, which has nothing of the imperfections of the materiality of this world. Moreover, God has the whole world as His body. The relation of the body to the soul, expresses the relation of the world to God, with this exception, that God has a perfect control of His body and is not touched by *karma.* Moreover, when He evolves the world by His will, God penetrates into nature as its inner controller, and within the souls as their silent witness. Then God appears in the different avatārs in which there is but one personality, the divine. God assumes all these forms for the good of His devotees. Lastly, God resides with His viśuddha-sattva body in the statue and in the sālagrāma, the ammonite stone, the symbol of Vishnu. The statue is, so to say, an avatār of God for the sake of the worshipper.

The Souls

The souls are infinite in number, and are of the same quality. Some souls have fallen away from God and some have remained loyal. The fallen souls were introduced into matter according to their *karma*, and there exist as gods, men, animals, or plants. Souls are pure spirits, and their materiality clings to them as dust clings to the diamond.

Nature

Nature embraces all the material objects, and all the functions by which the soul is able to build up for herself a world-consciousness. Nature is the instrument by which God punishes and purifies the souls that have turned away from Him.

Practical Theology

The soul must be liberated from transmigration and brought back to God, of whom she is a mode. This can only be realised by true knowledge, *Jnāna*. But Rāmānuja understands by knowledge affective knowledge. The soul who has forgotten God must again remember God, and so intensely that the representation of God becomes again a presentation. The way to meditate on God consists in the soul considering herself again as a mode of God, that is, as a being that is only by God, in God, and for God, and which has nothing to do with the material world and its enjoyments. Rāmānuja maintains that when the love of God arises, the soul must go on performing the scriptural and devotional duties. His reason is that the soul, by its infinite series of sins, has offended God, and good works have a propitiatory value. When the soul is liberated, it ascends to the heaven of Vishnu, Vaikuntha, and lives with Him for ever in eternal happiness.

Religion in Rāmānujism

Vaishṇavism is based on the cult of the statue in the temple. But Rāmānuja hardly refers to this side of his system. It almost looks as if he wished to reduce religion to devotional contemplation. Moreover, he does but incidentally mention the innumerable forms of God. Hence it comes that the theory looks decidedly better than the practice. This is again one of the particularities of Hinduism, that the philosophy which lies at the back of its religion looks much better than its religion as it is practised by the masses.

3. MADHVA (1199-1278)

The theology of Madhva does not go much beyond that of Rāmānuja. He also seeks release in devotion and surrender to Vishnu. His metaphysics is inspired by his hatred of Śaṅkara and his disciples. He fought them continually during his life-time. If Śaṅkara maintains that "thou art that", or that the individual soul is identical with

Brahman whole and undivided, Madhva retorts that "thou art not that", or that the individual soul is not identical with Brahman, but has at most, on account of its spiritual nature, some resemblance with it. Moreover, material nature, on account of its imperfections, cannot have anything in common with God. Hence Dualism. There are two realities, God and the world, entirely distinct from one another. On the other hand, Madhva emphasizes the dependence of nature and of souls on God. Liberation consists in becoming one with God, but even in this state Madhva makes the submission to God and the recognition of His transcendence the source of heavenly bliss. The sect which he founded is still alive and flourishing. One of his peculiarities is that he teaches predestination, and admits the eternity of hell. This belief need not be ascribed to Christian influence.

4. NIMBĀRKA (13th century?)

Around 800 A.D., the Bhāgavata Purāṇa appeared and gave a new impetus to the Krishna cult. Madhva quotes the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, but does not mention the cult of Rādhā, the mistress of Krishna. Vishnu Svāmin, the founder of a petty sect which has almost disappeared, is the first to introduce the cult of Rādhā as the mistress of Krishna. It is, however, Nimbārka who works out this aspect of Vaishṇavism.[1] In his system we meet with the conception that Krishna, the supreme God, lives in Vrindāvana, which is the highest heaven, and that his supreme pastime consists in dallying with Rādhā and all the other milkmaids *(gopīs)*, and that the highest release consists in being admitted to these sports. In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Vrindāvana is supposed to be a place here on earth, but the innovation consists in making this place the highest heaven, and in considering the events that took place in Vrindāvana as the eternal happenings on the supreme plane of the Godhead. Vallabha and Caitanya will carry still further this conception. Nimbārka, in metaphysics, held the *bheda-abheda* view according to which the world is one with God and distinct from Him at the same time.

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[1] Recent research has established that this ascription is wrong since the Nimbārka who commented on the Vedānta Sūtra lived in the sixth century A.D. (editor's note).

5. VALLABHA (1479-1531)

Vallabha is perhaps the most original theologian of the Vedānta. But his theology is saturated with all the mythology of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Krishna

Krishna, the cowherd of Vrindāvana, is the supreme God. He is identical with Brahman, and His fundamental essence is Being, Knowledge and Bliss. He is also identical with Bhagavān, and possesses the six *gunās* that express His independence and glory. But His supreme form is that of the cowherd Krishna, His human form. Vrindāvan is His highest abode, and the *gopīs* originate from Him as His *śaktis*. Rādhā is His principal *śakti*. The body of Krishna, that of the *gopīs*, and of all the heavenly inhabitants is made of *ānanda*, or joy, which means that the forms which God and his elect assume are only meant to express the divine joy and shape it. There is nothing of the imperfection of earthly matter in the highest abode. In this way the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which records the adventures of Krishna and the *gopīs*, becomes a description of heaven itself. Besides all these forms, Krishna owns all the forms of the avatārs and of the Trimūrti. Krishna is indeed the god of infinite forms. He is Brahman, Bhagavān, He is His *śaktis*, or the *gopīs*, the avatārs and the Trimūrti. Such a God must possess contradictory forms, nay, be a substratum of all the contradictions. How to conciliate for instance the absolute form of Brahman with the finite human form of Krishna, which is as essential as His divine form. Vallabha declares that it is the ornament of God to appear as the substratum of all contradictions. This dogma shows that the theologian gives up the task to conciliate mythology with metaphysics, and considers the contradictory character as an object of belief that defies further explanation.

Metaphysics

God is in Himself Being, Knowledge, and Bliss. But God has the power to reveal Himself, and to hide Himself by revealing Himself. He reveals Being and hides His Bliss and His knowledge, and material nature arises. He reveals Being and Knowledge and hides His Bliss, and we face the plane of the souls. Lastly, He reveals His Being, Knowledge, and Bliss, and the plane of the inner controller, or of God immanent in nature, and the soul arises. All that is in the world is but an explicitation of God. All is God, and hence there is no real change and diversity in the world, there being no transition from being to non-being, but only from implicit being to explicit being. All diversity is but a different visibility of the One. Vallabha is consistent in his pantheism.

Samsāra

The samsāra as the world of change and of vicissitudes is but a world due to a wrong interpretation. It is we who read such a world into this true world, which is but an unfolding of the power of God, and therefore a world as it ought to be.

Liberation

Liberation must consist in ridding ourselves of the wrong world of our own interpretation. We must realize that we are but forms of God, that we are by God, in God, and for God. We must give up our selfishness by which we oppose ourselves to God as distinct beings that claim the world as their property.

The Ways

According to Vallabha there are three ways, the way of the stream *(pravāha-mārga)* or the way of the soul which remains always selfish and passes from rebirth to rebirth till it is reabsorbed in the *māyā* of God and blotted out. There is a second way, the way of the soul that follows the prescriptions of the Veda *(maryādā-mārga)* and by unselfish *karma* reaches knowledge and absorption in God. Vallabha, however, has come to proclaim a third way, the way of the soul who, by the mere grace of God, is led to the highest love *(pushti-mārga),* which consists in loving God for the sake of God. The soul consecrates itself to God, and wishes only to be what the grace of God makes of it. Here *bhakti* has reached its highest expression, since it is based on absolute surrender. We must admire it in so far as it is directed to Brahman or Bhagavān, but the fact is that the mythological Krishna hides too much this divine aspect, and claims absolute surrender to a God who reveals Himself in amorous sportings which at best are but a symbol, and a symbol which, as the Vallabhists confess themselves, is most dangerous for the non-qualified.

Predestination

The souls that always remain selfish come from the mind of God, and are predestined to the eternal loss in the *samsāra*. The souls that follow the Veda come from the divine Word, and are called to absorption in God, whence they may be recalled to higher ways. The souls which Grace leads to participation in the amorous sports of Krishna for ever come from the divine joy-body. Predestination is taught, and is based on the different origin of the souls from God.

6. CAITANYA (1485-1533)

The school of Caitanya, the great Vaishnavite reformer of Bengal, has worked out a theology which is very similar to that of Vallabha. They consider Krishna as revealing Himself under three aspects, as Brahman, as Bhagavān, and as the Highest Self *(Parama-ātmā)*. Brahman is but a blurred conception of Bhagavān, the personal God, and the Highest Self is the immanent God. The mythology of Krishna is taken over in its entirety and considered as the eternal happenings on the highest summit of reality. Krishna can be served as master, as friend, as son, as bridegroom. In the last case the example of the *gopīs* becomes the standard of the highest sanctity. The sect considers the way of *karma* and of *jnāna* as valid, provided they are resorted to for the purpose of gaining *bhakti*. *Bhakti*, or the love of God, is twofold, the *bhakti* which is the means and the *bhakti* which is the end. The *bhakti* which is a means consists in praising God, in revering Him, in serving Him. The service of God culminates in a complete surrender to God. The service of God takes place at the feet of the statue. But the *siddhānta* insists also on the mental cult. One of their practices consists in identifying themselves with either a servant, a friend, the mother of Krishna, or with a *gopī*, and contemplate in this capacity the sports of Krishna in order to realize what a kind master, friend, son and bridegroom God is. The development of *bhakti* depends on the grace of God which, however, is secured as soon as one feels attracted towards the love-service of God. Rādhā, of course, as the divine *śakti*, plays a preponderant part in this system, being the source of love for Krishna, and the highest model of *bhakti*. The sect has divinized Caitanya as an avatar of Krishna and Rādhā. Caitanya has introduced into the cult the *kīrtan*, or the song in honour of Krishna, accompanied with dancing. The Caitanya sect is still flourishing in Bengal.

*A new branch, called International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), was implanted recently in U.S.A. and has grown to world dimension. (*Editor's addition)

7. THE RĀMA SECT

There is also a sect which considers Rāma, the hero of the Rāmāyana, as the highest God. The sect seems to have existed from the early times of Vaishṇavism, but it was Rāmānanda, a theologian of the south, who came to the north and propagated there the cult of Rāma. His influence must have been great, since nowadays over two hundred millions of Indians are Rāma-worshippers. Their theology is taken from Rāmānuja. But it was ***Tulsi Das*** (1532 - 1623) who gave a new impetus to this cult of the hero of the Rāmāyana. He wrote a more spiritual Rāmāyana in Hindi, and the love of God is beautifully described in the life-story of Rāma, who is Brahman and Vishnu himself. Many passages come very near to Christian thought. But the mythology of Hinduism and the conceptions of the Vedānta, *karma*, and transmigration, and to a certain extent the philosophical non-dualism, are all retained.

Kabīr (1440 - 1518) was also a disciple of Rāmānanda, and with him Moslem influence comes to bear on Indian thought. Sufist, neoplatonic, and gnostic conceptions abound in the theology of Kabīr. He criticizes severely the image-worship, pilgrimages, ascetic practices, the caste-system, and opposes Indian polytheism and the avatāra-theory. There is but one God who must be worshipped by the heart, and all the various religions are but forms of the one fundamental religion which Kabīr has again discovered.

Nānak (1469 - 1538), the guru and founder of the Sikh religion, has a theology similar to that of Kabīr. He also insists on the religion of the heart and deprecates image-worship. He was followed by nine gurus. Arjan, the fifth guru, compiled the *Granth*, or the sacred book of the sect. The last guru transformed the community into a camp which fought the Mogul Empire. But the followers of Kabīr and Nānak have reverted little by little to some Hindu practices. The centre of Sikhism is in Amritsar, where the golden temple stands, in which the *Granth* is preserved. The worship of the *Granth* belongs now to the cult of the Sikhs.

Conclusion

Hinduism may be called the most searching quest in the natural order of the Divine that the world has known. Notice how many conceptions it has in common, at least materially, with Christianity. The Indians have their theory about the inspiration of their sacred books, about predestination, the grace of God, the vision of God, the gradual realisation of this divine vision by the three ways of purification, illumination and union, the exaltation of the love of God for His own sake, and of ourselves and of the world as it is in the plan of God, etc., The unwelcome features, of course, are the rebirth theory, linked up with the caste system. The inequality of men on account of their different origin from God is a theory that entails social injustice, which is all the worse for finding its sanction in religion. Mythology, again, disfigures to a great extent the sublime conceptions the Indians have of God. The theory that God on His plane has a human form opens the door to an unbearable anthropomorphism by which the sublime conceptions of Brahman and Bhagavān run the risk of becoming insignificant. The aberrations of *śaktism* are but one consequence of this anthropomorphism. Mythology also makes the theory of the divine descents inacceptable in so far as it presents as divine happenings the fairy tales of the Epics and the Purāṇas. The almost magical conception of sacrifice, asceticism, and prayer remains a source of endless superstition.

But in spite of these shortcomings, we must aver that the quest of India was not futile. They have found God and their own soul, and said sublime things about the relation which the soul must have to God. It is, of course, in the great theologies that we must study this movement. One of their most sublime conceptions is their theory about selfishness as the great world-evil. Man became the source of evil of this world when, from an hoary beginning, he turned away from God and from his own soul, and identified himself with his body and through it with the material world. The Indians have a keen conception of this sin. Sublime is also the doctrine that man, to find his peace, must turn away from the world and his worldly self towards God, his soul, and his world, as they are in God, and that this conversion can only be brought about by the love of God, which ends in wholesale surrender and submission. The highest conception, however, is reached when they aver that the soul that surrenders to God will also find a God who is all surrender to it, so that at the end God, by His love, becomes dependent on the soul.

We must say also that Hinduism in its better doctrines has not erred about the nature of God but about the relation which the world has to God. The usual definition of God as *saccidānanda* (Being, Knowledge, Bliss) is the best possible definition of God. God is absolute Being, the absolute Subject. God is absolute Knowledge, the absolute Predicate. God is absolute self-sufficiency or Bliss, the absolute copula of identity that unites the absolute Predicate with the absolute Subject. We notice here that the definition as *saccidānanda* is rigorously constructed on our judgment and, moreover, it shows that the judgment surpasses itself, for if Being and Knowledge are united by absolute identity, all their opposition disappears, and we are landed into the transcendent absoluteness, which is above all difference and all identity based on difference. Our highest knowledge consists in the realisation that God transcends all that we can know about Him. Hence Śaṅkara likes to repeat that God is neither this nor that (neti, neti), but that God is absolute Silence if we try to attain to the Knowledge which He has of Himself. We must synthetize him with Rāmānuja, who reconstructs the idea of God with the category of substance, and maintains that God has an infinite number of attributes. Śaṅkara again is right when he maintains that the world is contained in God and absorbed in His Reality. The laws of intelligibility makes us reduce the world to God till it disappears in Him, who is the foundation of all the possibles. But the same laws of intelligibility make us deduce the world from God, who contains it eminently since he is absolute fullness. Śaṅkara stopped at the deduction; we must therefore accept Rāmānuja also, who maintains that the world is real by God, in God, and for God. It does not remain within the divine implication but is explicitated: from being present to God in His way it has become present to itself in its own way. But to avoid the semi-pantheism of Rāmānuja, who considers the world as an inner mode of participation of God, we must resort to a more perfect notion of creation which will declare it to be totally from God, independently of any extrinsic matter, and shows it to be an external mode of participating in God. The world is outside God because it is inside itself. From the practical side we must remind Śaṅkara that our return to God cannot be merely an intelligible return to our ultimate ground and foundation; we must accept Rāmānuja, who maintains that we must return to

God with a vision that is able to contemplate God as He contemplates Himself, and repose in Him as He reposes in Himself. But again we must deny the pantheistic position of Rāmānuja that our mere deliverance from selfishness, and on this account from our body and our material world, is sufficient to adjust us to the Divine vision. Coming from nothing, and being able only to realise God in and through the world, and in and through our own soul, we cannot see God as He sees Himself, if grace does not transfigure our nature and divinize it. God, by His grace, must create a new eye within our soul by which we are able to see Him in the light of His self-knowledge, and a new heart by which we are able to repose in Him as He reposes in Himself.

The way of purification *(karma-yoga)*, the way of illumination *(jnāna-yoga)*, and the way of unitive love *(bhakti-yoga)*, are beautifully conceived in the various systems, and must be seen as one of the great achievements of Indian thought. The Hindus have a grand spirituality. It is not supernatural, since often they do not see that the souls have to transcend themselves with the grace of God. They rather say that they have to return with the grace of God to their divine nature, which they possess on account of their being in one way or other modes of God. Their spirituality is mainly based on their semi-pantheistic conception of the soul. Grace does nothing else than to lead the souls back from an unnatural condition to their natural condition, from their identification with the material world to their identification with God. But the three ways first retain their meaning. The first or *karma*-way, is beautifully illustrated by the saying that we must do our religious duties without aiming at a temporal reward. It is unselfishness in our conduct that purifies our soul and prepares it for the way of illumination. For, the more we turn our heart from the world, the more we are able to gather our mental light from its dispersion on material objects, and concentrate it inwards, where the vision of God and of our own soul as it is in God, i.e., where the ideal manifests itself. The true knowledge of God will, of course, induce us to disidentify ourselves from the world and our worldly self in order to identify ourselves with God, and in God with our ideal world and our ideal self. But only love can achieve this whole identification with God. Śaṅkara thinks that mystical absorption in God constitutes our identification with God. But the more numerous *bhaktas* proclaim that surrender to God inspired by love makes us one with God. For we wish to be only by God, for God, and in God, what we are in His cognition. We wish to be nothing for ourselves in order to be everything for God. But does such a surrender blot out our distinct existence from God? Not at all. For the *bhaktas* maintain that the more we are for God, the more God will be for us. Our identification with God will bring it about that God will identify Himself with us, and put at our disposal His own life, and His own happiness. Already the Bhāgavata Purāṇa said that God is enslaved by the *bhakta* and dependent on him.

Let us make ourselves for God by wholesale surrender, for God has made Himself for us by wholesale surrender. This is the last word of Indian spirituality, and if Hindus cling to their religion with such tenacity, it is because this aspect is prominent everywhere. No form of God, be it man-like, animal or image, surprises them by its unfitness, for they will point to the condescension of God in adjusting Himself to us even in such a poor way. Hence their endearing devotion to Krishna, who is interpreted as the God of all condescension.

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Chapter 3

The Religious Discoveries of the Vedic Indians

(*R. De Smet*)

I. IN THE VEDAS

1. How to explain the order of the world?

What struck the Aryans first when they began to settle in India seems to have been the orderly course (**ṛta**) of nature, especially the regular return of the rains. They not only rejoiced in this order but began to wonder about its hidden causes. Such was the first of several radical questions to the solution of which they applied their minds.

Their solving method:

They did not make wild guesses nor opted for simple animistic or naturalistic solutions but thought they should conceive the unknown on the basis of the known. Their experience provided them with a model: the order of their society of three (soon four) classes (**jāti**), characterized by hierarchy, complementarity, heredity and an intelligent distribution of the diverse tasks resulting in a satisfactory social and economic order. Now they already knew of some invisible, powerful beings, the **asuras** (lordly spirits) but these were connected with the original chaos, the **asat** (non-being, i.e., the still unshaped elements). However, there were also **devas,** great invisible denizens of the **dev,** which is the lit part of the world.[1] [We translate **devas** by "gods", but these gods did not really possess what we call godhead or divinity]. They were not strictly speaking a pantheon but could they not be conceived on the pattern of the human society made of classes?

The agents of the cosmic order

Indeed, such a conception is not alien to the Vedic hymns in which we see that the cosmic functions are looked after by specialized **devas,** who are the lords-and-servants of the world: *Sovereignty* **(kṣatra)** is exercised by a king, **Varuna** (an ex-asura turned deva), assisted by an overseer of all contracts, **Mitra,** an overseer of marriage contracts, **Aryaman,** and a lord of war (against the promoters of disorder, the asuras) **Indra** with his troops, the **Maruts.**

Religion (dharma, i.e., **ṛta** as maintained by the sacrificial and social norms) is the province of **Agni** (Fire), the mediator who links devās and men by the sacrificial flames and smoke, and **Soma**, whose substrate is the liquor of immortality pressed out from a plant no longer well known and now unavailable. They are assisted by minor gods, whose names are derived from the sacrificial rites and instruments. **Sraddhā** (faith) and **Tapas** (asceticism) are also important sacrificial devās. *Fertility* is ensured by solar devas: the **Aśvins,** the twin riders associated with Venus, **Uṣas,** which is Dawn, **Sūrya,** which is the sun as the exciter **(Savitṛ)** to whom the **Gāyatrī** prayer is addressed,[2] **Viṣṇu,** the sun as ascending in three steps to the top of the world, **Pūṣan,** the sun as guide of travellers. Working with them are **Vāyu,** the wind-god, and **Parjanya,** the rain-god. These devas are the patrons of the **Vaiśya** class of cattle-owners and (after B.C.900) cultivators. The artisans have also their own patrons, **Viśva-karma,** the all -fabricator, also called **Tvaṣṭar,** the carpenter.

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[1] Of which shape were the **devas** imagined to be? "Some say, they are at the image of man, for they are endowed with intelligence as is manifest from the praises addressed and the names given to them; besides, the limbs, the attributes or instruments, and the deeds attributed to them are of the same nature as those of man. But others say, No, they must not be at the image of man for what of them is seen is not humanlike, for instance, fire, wind, the sun, the earth, the moon." (Yāska, **Nirukta,** 7:6-7).

[2] **Om! Bhūr-bhuva-svaḥ!**
Tat-savitur-vareṇyam
Bhārgo devasya dhīmahi.
Dhīyo yo naḥ pracodayāt.
Om! Earth, atmosphere, sky!
On the desirable [splendour] of the Exciter,
On that splendour of the god, let us meditate.
Our minds may he stimulate.

A fourth group exists made of semi-gods, such as the **Gāndharvas,** and female deities, such as the **Apsaras,** originated from popular (Dravidian?) religion.

Unlike the gods of the Middle East, the **devas** are promoters of order, hence, auspicious to men who have neither to fear nor to propitiate them. Men can be sure that the gods are continuously overcoming the promoters of disorder **(anṛta)**. Popular imagination refers to the latter under various names: **Paṇis, Dāsas, Rakṣas, Yātus, Dānavas, etc.**

2. Can men help the devās to maintain the ṛta?

Again the answer was found from what happened in their society. Just as they fed their servants well and praised them to keep them happy in their service, they would *feed* (through fire offerings and libations) and *praise* (through hymns) the cosmic servants. This would be the **yajña,** the Vedic sacrifice.[3] It became a vast technique trusted and highly developed in Vedic times for the obtention of progeny (of men and cattle), food, health, wealth, success in war, peace and prosperity, success in love, family harmony, forgiveness of sins (especially by Varuṇa) and protection from faults and crimes, long life (even up to 100 years). Afterlife still appeared nebulous but it was thought eventually that the **yajamānas,** i.e., the husband and wife who employed the brahmin priests for performing a sacrifice in their name, could secure for themselves ritually fashioned bodies of immortality and thus hyper-selves **(adhyātman) [De Smet, 1982].** But there was *not yet any idea of* ***mokṣa,*** *i.e.,* liberation from **karma** and rebirth which are later conceptions.

Due to the importance of the sacrificial technique an abundant oral literature developed made of praises (the first 3 **Vedas**), explanations of the rites (**Brāhmaṇas**) and speculations (**Āraṇyakas** and **Upaniṣads**) of which a conspectus is provided here.

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[3] Compare with **doulia,** the worship of the servants of God (angels and saints) as distinguished by the Catholic Church from **latria,** the worship of adoration reserved to God alone.

3. How to explain the very existence of the world?

This question is not raised before the most recent hymns of the Ṛg-veda, probably around 1000 B.C. In some of these hymns, it starts a search for the radical cause or causes of the universe. The Vedic thinkers display here their metaphysical genius and may be said to invent philosophy, the quest for the ultimate causes of beings. Again they start from their experience and look for models of production. Not only one or two, but all such possible models are called upon and tested in poems which present a creation myth.

General conspectus of Vedic Literature (Śruti)

Samhitās	*Brāhmaṇas*	*Āraṇyakas*	*Upaniṣads*
Ṛgveda	Aitareya Kauṣītaki	Aitareya Kauṣītaki	1. Aitareya 2. Kauṣītaki
Sāmaveda	Pañcavimśa Chāndogya Talavakāra		3. Chāndogya 4. Kena
Yajurveda	Taittirīya	Taittirīya	5. Taittirīya 6. Mahānārāyaṇa 7. Kaṭhaka 8. Maitrayanīya 9. Śvetāśvatara
	Śatapatha	Bṛhad	10. Bṛhadāraṇayaka 11. Iśā
Atharvaveda	Gopatha		12. Muṇḍaka 13. Praśna 14. Māṇḍukya

We may classify the creation myths as follows:

1) *The biological models:* Plants are born from seeds, birds and reptiles from eggs, mammals develop from an embryo in a womb fecundated by male sperm. Could not the world have developed from a "Golden Embryo" as suggested by *Ṛgveda* X:121 "In the beginning **Hiraṇya-garbha** evolved"?

The interest of this model is that the whole effect comes from *one* cause only. However, this cause is material and non-intelligent. It produces through a self-transformation (**pariṇāma**) by which it remains immanent to, and non-dual with, its effect but loses its monadic integrity. But other models exist.

2) *The technological models:* Architects measure (**mā-**) the ground and lay foundations (**dhā-**) of palaces, etc., smiths forge metal into tools and carpenters fashion (**takṣ-**) wood into beds, doors, etc., potters mould clay into jars, etc., weavers weave (**tan-**) thread into cloth. Should we not conceive of an Artisan of the cosmos as in X:81 "The All-Maker (**Viśva-karma**), seer of all, brought forth the earth, and by his might unfolded the heavens"?

Perhaps, but this cannot be the ultimate answer, for a further question arises, "What was the primal matter (**adhiṣṭhāna**)? What the beginning? How and what manner of thing was that from which he brought forth the earth?" This model provides an intelligent but a partial cause only. The artisan gives the shape but not the reality of the effect which must come from an unaccounted for primal matter. Besides he does not remain immanent to his creation. Thus their relation is strictly dualistic. However, the Vedic thinkers find in their experience a third type of model:

3) *The sacrificial model*: Here are the most important ślokās of the **Puruṣa-sūkta** or Hymn of the [Primordial] Male (X:90) in which creation is conceived as the sacrifice of an archetypal Male whose dismembering produces all the parts of the world:

1- A thousand heads has the Puruṣa,
A thousand eyes, a thousand feet;
Encompassing the earth on every side,
He exceeds it by ten fingers' [breadth].

2- The Puruṣa is this whole [universe],
What was and what is yet to be;...

3- All [mortal] beings form a quarter of him,
Three-quarters are the immortals in heaven....

6- When with Puruṣa as their oblation
The gods performed the sacrifice,
Spring was the melted butter,
Summer the fuel, and autumn the oblation.

8- From this sacrifice completely offered
The clotted ghee was gathered up:

From this He fashioned beasts and birds,
Creatures of the woods and creatures of the village.
9- From this sacrifice completely offered
Were born the **ṛcs** (praises), the **sāmans** (sung hymns),...
From this were born the **yajus** (sacrificial formulas).
11- When they divided the Puruṣa,
Into how many parts did they divide him?
What was his mouth? what his arms?
What are his thighs called? what his feet?
12- The **brāhmin** was his mouth,
His arms were made the prince **(rājanya=kṣatriya)**,
His thighs the common people **(vaiśya)**
And from his feet was born the serf **(sūdra)**
13- From his mind the moon was born,
And from his eye the sun,
From his mouth Indra and the fire **(Agni)**,
From his breath the wind **(Vāyu)**.
14- From his navel arose the atmosphere,
From his head the sky evolved
From his feet the earth, and from his ears the cardinal points.
So did they fashion forth these worlds...
16- These were the first normative **(dharma)** rites...

In this model, the advantages of the other two are found united. The cause is one only: an intelligent male Giant in whom all powers reside. Hence he is so great that his greatness suffices to produce the totality of the universe and to exceed it. He creates the immortals, the **devas** whose creaturely status here becomes clear, and the mortals. Then the devas dismember him sacrificially into all the parts of this complex universe, including the animal species, the four classes of men, their **Vedās,** and their normative rites.

Despite the large explanatory scope of this myth, disadvantages remain. It is through a **parināma,** a transformation of his physical being, that the Puruṣa produces the universe and thus exhausts himself. **Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa** II:3.6.1 will describe this dramatically:

> In the beginning, he immolated himself to the devas
> by giving them this own self. When he was lying down,

> all cut up, and was only a heart, it is his self that he bewailed: "Ah! my **ātman!"** he said.

Further, no one knows his name. They try to apply to him the names of all kinds of gods, but none really suits him for he is greaer than any of them. They speak of him as "That One".

> What was That One who in the unborn's imāge has established and fixed firm the six regions of this world? To what is One the sages give many a name....(I:164, 6 & 46)

The most philosophical hymn, X:129, expresses the powerlessness of men truly to conceive the manner of his creating. It is the task of the next age to de-materialize "That One" **(Tad-Ekam)** and discover. its perfect transcendence without losing its immanence.

II. IN THE BRĀHMAṆAS

The aim of these books is to explain the norms and rites of sacrifices in all their details. While doing that, the sages discover the *method of affinities* **(bandhutā nyāya)** based on the Hymn of the Puruṣa:

Because the universe began through the cosmogonic sacrifice, there must be a complete affinity between it and the sacrifice. To each element of the latter there must correspond something in the universe. Now that which gives efficacy to the sacrifices is their specific formula, namely, the special prayer **(brahman)** proper to each. In that **brahman** resides the sacrificial power. The **brahman** of the first sacrifice was uttered by the Puruṣa as either "Let me now create worlds" or "May I be many" according to various versions of the myth. It continues to be immanent to the universe as it maintains it. In what can it be located and possibly identified? This question initiates the quest of the Upaniṣadic thinkers.

III. IN THE UPANIṢADS

These thinkers turn their attention first towards the candidates for greatness in nature: the sun, the wind, the fire, space, matter (food), etc. but soon, under the guidance of the great sage Yājñavalkya, they turn towards the human self **(ātman)**. Indeed, if the wielder of the creative **brahman** dwells in the world, he must be dwelling in each one of us and be our highest **ātman,** the very root of our intelligence and being and thus the noblest entity, transcending all material entities. This is the **Brahman** (with a capital B). But how to discover and identify it in us?

Around this question the search becomes most intense. The term **ātman** (self) is the reflexive pronoun. It can designate whatever belongs to the sphere of the subject, i.e., not only himself but also his wife, children or cows, his gross body, his subtle body (said to be made of subtle matter and comprising vital energies, organs of action, external senses, internal senses such as mind and intellect, their various products, such as acquired qualities and habits), his consciousness in its several stages (waking, dream and deep sleep), his soul (**jīvātman**) and above all, his transcendent Cause since it dwells in him as his inner Ruler (**Antar-yāmin**). This is his supreme Self (**Paramātman**).[4] It is the object of progressive insights:

—This Ātman is not this, not this (**neti neti**). BAU (**=Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad**) III:9.26.

—Brahman is Consciousness, Bliss, [and man's] Goal (**vijñā nam ānandam Brahma...Parāyaṇam).** BAU III:9.28.7.

—It is not for the love of the husband (of the wife, of the sons, of wealth, of the brāhmin's or the prince's status, of the worlds, of the gods, of the contingent beings) that the husband (or any of those) is dearly loved. Rather it is for the love of the Ātman [who is the supreme Lovable and the root of all lovability]. It is the **Ātman**, indeed, that should be seen, heard about, thought on and deeply pondered. By (doing this and) discerning him, this whole (universe) is known [correctly, as totally caused by, and dependent on, him].[5] BAU II:4.5.

—This Ātman that dwells in all things is within you. What is other than it is perishable. BAU III.4.2.

—Once Brāhmins have come to know this **Ātman**, they rise above their desire for sons, riches, etc. and wander forth to lead

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[4] This use of "Self" does not sound right in English because the reflexive and the personal pronouns have not in English the same vast range of application as in Sanskrit. From this merely linguistic difference we should not think that pantheism is meant.

[5] The whole method of the **Vedānta** with its three steps, hearing, reflecting, pondering (**sravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana**) hopefully leading to intuition (**darśana**) is clearly in germ here.

> a beggar's life. They, first, lead a childlike life **(bālya)** in learning **(paṇḍitya)**; then they reject these two and become silent sages (**muni**); lastly, they put away both silence and its opposite with disgust, (and become true) brāhmins (i.e., knowers of Brahman). BAU iii:5.1.[6]
>
> —He who, abiding in the breath, in the voice, in the eye, ear, mind and understanding, is other than them, unknown by them, whose body they are, who controls them from within, he is the **Ātman** within you, the inner Controller **(Antaryāmin),** the Immoral.[7] BAU III:7.

The above texts declare again and again both the immanence and the transcendence of the **Brahman-Ātman.** It is within us, yet a goal to be reached by the way of renunciation and knowledge culminating in blissful intuition of the Infinite:

> —Happiness is nothing less than the Infinite **(bhūman);** there is no happiness in the finite **(alpa)..**Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, knows nothing else, that is the Infinite...It is the same as the Immortal; the finite is the same as the mortal. CU [=**Chāndogya Up**.] VII: 23-24.
>
> —From the un-Real, lead me to the Real,
> From darkness lead me to Light,
> From death lead me to the Immortal.[8] BAU 1:3.28.

Let us now turn to another "great sentence" **(mahā vākya)** central in the teaching of Uddālaka Aruṇi to his son, Svetaketu:

> All these creatures have Being (**Sat**) as their Root (**mūla**), Being as their Resting-place (**āyatana**), Being as their Foundation **(pratiṣṭhā).**
>
> When a man dies, first his voice is absorbed into the mind, then the mind into breath, breath into heat, heat into the highest essence. This finest essence, the universe has it as its **Ātman.**

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[6] Note that the way of renunciation **(saṃnyāsa)** is presented here clearly as conducive to the knowledge of Brahman rather than to liberation from rebirth.

[7] Rāmānuja will base his doctrine on this text and its accompanying declarations.

[8] **Asato mā Sad-gamaya, tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya, mṛtyor-mā +mṛtam gamaya.**

> This is the Real **(Satya).** That is the **Ātman**. That thou art, Svetaketu (**Tat-tvam asi**) CU VI:6-7.

The medieval **Paiṅgala Upaniṣad** explains well this difficult text: "In such texts as **Tat-tvam asi, Tat** means the invisible, variegated [Lord] marked by omniscience, etc., endowed extrinsically with the creative power, defined as Reality-Consciousness-Bliss **(Sac-cid ānanda)**, the womb of the world. **Tvam** means that very [same Lord] as united with the inner sense and carried by the I-conception. *By stripping the supreme of his extrinsic attribute, 'creative power,' and the individual of his extrinsic attribute, 'ignorance,'* the Reality *indicated* by **Tattvam** [becomes revealed as] the Brahman not separated from the inner [self]."

Thus it is by way of interiority that the **Chāndogya Up.** teaches the ascent to Brahman in insightful sentences:

> Truly, the Atman is in the heart. My Atman within the heart is that Brahman,... smaller than a grain of rice,... greater than the earth and all the worlds. CU III: 14.
>
> And the name of Brahman is **Satyam** (Reality-Truth), understood as **sat,** the immortal, **ti,** the mortal, and **Yam,** the Controller of those two...

It is by taking refuge in this Controller that man reaches his ultimate blissful goal:

> Indeed, the Atman is a causeway (**setu**) holding these worlds apart lest they should split asunder. On it neither day passes nor night, neither old age nor death nor sorrow... All evils recoil from it. And so, let the blind pass along it and he will regain his sight, let the fevered [pass along] and his fever will be cooled. Once a man has passed along it, night will reveal itself as day, for this Brahma-world is eternally light.

The third great Upaniṣad, **Taittirīya Up.,** (TU) provides important definitions of the Brahman-Atman:

> — Who so knows Brahman wins the all-highest. Brahman is **Satyaṁ-Jñnānam-anantam,** Reality-Knowledge infinite. TU II:1.
>
> — That from which these beings are born, by which, once born, they live, into which they enter when they die, that is Brahman. Try, Bhrigu, my son, to understand this by mortification **(tapas)**. [The boy did and understood finally that] Brahman is Bliss **(Ananda)**. TU III:1-6.

> —Intelligence (**Prajña**) is the Basis of all. Brahman is Intelligence. **Aitareya Up.:** III:i.3.
>
> —This **Prajñātman**, Bliss, unageing, immortal,... is the Guardian of the worlds, their Sovereign and universal Lord.
>
> Let a man know, "He is my Atman." **Kauṣītakī Up.** III:9.

All those definitions are summed up and illuminated by the term **pūrṇa** full, or **pūrṇatā**, plenitude:

> **Pūrṇam-adaḥ, pūrṇam-idam:** High there is the [qualitative and transcendent] Full; this [universe] here is the [quantitative and contingent] full.
>
> **Pūrṇāt pūrṇam-udacyate:** From the Full, this full arises. **Pūrṇasya pūrṇam-āsāya:** Though from the Full, the full is taken, **Pūrṇam-evā+vaṣiṣyate:** The full itself remains.
>
> **Iśā Up., initial invocation.**

In the middle Upaniṣads, all these teachings are repeated triumphantly but with an apophatic sense of the mystery of the Supreme:

> —Other it is, for sure, from the known and also beyond the unknown, So have we heard from men of old...That which cannot be expressed by speech,...that is Brahman...Known by an awakening (**pratibodha**), it is [rightly] known. **Kena Up.I:4-5 and II:4.**

How to obtain this awakening becomes the chief question. Will it be through meditating or by being taught or...by his grace?

> —How difficult for man, through meditating much, To know Him from the lips of vulgar men; [Yet] unless another tells of Him, the way is barred...More subtle than the subtle, greater than the great, The Ātman is hidden in the heart of every creature. The man without desire, all sorrows spent, beholds him, *By the Creator's grace* [also translated 'through the tranquillity of the mind,'], [he sees] the majesty of the Ātman.
>
> ...This Ātman cannot be grasped by instruction, Nor by sacrifice or much lore heard: By him alone can He be grasped whom He *elects* (**vṛṇute**): To him the Ātman *reveals* His own form. **Katha Up.**I:2.8,20,23.
>
> —He cannot be apprehended by voice or mind or eye.
>
> How then,...unless we say—HE IS ?...

> HE IS—when once we understand Him thus,
> His true essence is limpidly shown forth. **Katha** II:3.12-13

This is the worship of *latria,* the worship directed to the absolute God alone beyond the reach of sacrifice since, unlike the **devās,** He does not need to be fed and encouraged through praises. We worship Him worthily by recognizing with admiration and joy that HE IS unrestrictedly. Once this worship "in spirit and in truth" is discovered, there occurs the definitive parting of the ways between the old Vedism, centred on **yajña** and **devās**, and this spiritual worship of the transcendent Dweller in one's heart. Its method is described in the last (around 300 B.C.) great Upaniṣad, the **Svetāśvatara,** which is the first **Śaiva** document:

> By (1) fixing one's mind on Him **(abhidhyāna),** (2) uniting with Him **(yojana)**, (3) contemplating **(bhāva)** His true Reality, the total cessation **(nivṛtti)** of the mundane illusion will take place...
>
> By the power of austerity and by the grace of God **(devaprasāda)** did the wise Svetāśvatara make Brahman rightly known...This highest mystery of the Veda's end **(Vedānta)** was propounded in an earlier age...To the great-souled man **(mahātman)** whose highest devotion **(bhakti)** is for God, the matter of this discourse shines forth. I:10; VI:21-23.

CONCLUSION: THE VEDIC MAN

This survey of the Aryans' religious discoveries from the earliest Vedic time to around 300 B.C. has offered glimpses of their conception of man which deserve to be somewhat elaborated.

1. *The Vedic Sacrificer.* He finds himself very much at home on earth. Everything cooperates to his welfare: his family, clan and class within the quadripartite society where all functions are well organized and complementary; the gods whose repeated victories over the forces of disorder make his world orderly and secure; **yajña,** the all-procuring technique of sacrifice around which all his life revolves; nature with its regular monsoons providing abundance of food for men and beasts. Optimism is the mark of the Vedic man. He hardly thinks of afterlife. His ethnic religion, essentially a socio-ethical **dharma,** is this-worldly and his values are sacro-secular. His individuality is merged with his social appertaining. But a hope for an immortal **ātman** arises out of deeper reflection on sacrifice by some Brahmins.

2. *The Upaniṣadic Renouncer.* On the threshold of the era of the Upaniṣads, one of those new thinkers who leave their home and retire to the woods, gives us a new view of man:

> He knows tomorrow, he knows the world and what is not the world. By the mortal he desires the Immortal...Man is the sea, he is above all the world. Whatever he reaches, he desires to go beyond it. (**Aitareya Araṇyaka,** II:1.3)

This is the man of new aspirations who is discovering the Immortal and turns all his mental forces towards a realization of what he calls Brahman, the Ground of his being and his Inner Ruler. His sole goal is this Infinite and he decidedly rejects the finite. He puts himself in the margin of society, thus inventing renunciation (**saṅnyāsa**) which henceforth will become ubiquitous in India. Freeing himself from all social links, duties and rights, he endeavours to cool all his passions in order to pursue unrestrained his meditative quest for that Brahman which is his Self more truly than his own self. There is a continuity (originating from the **bandhutā** method) between the sacrificial religion and this quest for the Transcendent which is viewed as a mental sacrifice (**mānasika dharma**) but finally a great contrast.

3. *The Devotee.* Because the paths successively explored by those meditators (guided reflection on the cosmos, self-analysis, ascent from the less great to the greatest, renunciation and yoga-concentration) too often appeared to lead short of the Goal, the new insight arose that success depends on divine grace and even election. The Creator is the benign Dispenser (**Bhagavān**) and man is to turn to him through **bhakti**, that single-minded devotion which focuses him on this sole source of salvation. This Ātman is the supreme lovable and what sense is there in man's life and afterlife, except in loving Him exclusively and expecting from Him grace and final bliss?

Brahmabāndhāb Upādhyāy (1861-1907), the famous Bengali convert to Catholicism, when reflecting about the specificity of the Hindu people, found their mental characteristic to be one-centredness (**ek-niṣṭhatā**):

> The basis of Hinduness (**hindutva**), its essence, are the duties of caste and stage of life (**varṇāśramadharma**) and the one-centredness (**ekniṣṭhatā**) directing them...With regard to the ground of a particular thing, it is the Hindu's distinctiveness to enter the core of that thing... His mark is one-centredness or

interiority **(antardhān)...**[It was already] in the Āryan seers' spiritual vision **(ādhyātmik darśan).** Theirs was not to arrive at the First Cause by grasping the underlying thread of a sequence of cause-and-effect...In the heart of the contingently-existent **(asat),** changeful, unstable universe filled with names-and-forms dwells the existent **(sat),** still, stable, nameless and formless Essential Reality. Unconcerned with action and its fruits, the seers would behold in the womb of the visible the completely invisible Golden Germ **(Hiraṇyagarbha).**

Can any Christian get acquainted with this one-centredness and the extraordinary quest of the Vedic people — a quest which took them from the level of the devās to that of the absolute Brahman-Bhagavān by the way of interiority and divine grace — without being moved profoundly by a feeling of admiration and affinity. Christ who admired the one-centred faith of the Roman centurion, the Cananean woman and other non-Jews would have found in India a people marvellously attuned to the theocentrism of his Good News.

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Chapter 4

Śaṅkara's Non-dualism (Advaita-Vāda)

(R. De Smet)

The restoration of Upaniṣadic Brahmanism was the work of the Vedānta school, whose basic text was the Brahma-sūtra compiled by Bādarāyaṇa to harmonise the teachings of the Upaniṣads. Of the first Vedāntins we know hardly more than a few names. But the masterful commentary written by Śri Śaṅkarācārya on that Sūtra as well as his commentaries on nine Upaniṣads and on the Gītā together with some minor works set such a high standard of rigorous teaching that they immediately commanded the whole further development of the Vedānta school.

The dates of his life are uncertain. After exploring the whole question again during the last fifty years, specialists now agree to place him in the 8th century A.D. and more probably in the first half of that century. A Brāhmin, he was probably born at Kāladi (Malabar) and spent many years in the monastery which he founded in Śṛṅgeri (Mysore). He is generally reported to have died relatively young either in Kedarnāth (Himālaya) or perhaps in Kāñci. The other traditional details of his life are legendary.

What set him above all previous Vedāntins was his success in synthesizing for the first time the elements of pure wisdom scattered in the Upaniṣads and, through selection, adaptation or downright rejection, relating to that synthesis the variety of contrasting currents and doctrines which had developed up to his time. Before him, this variety had engendered bewilderment and scepticism or a sort of resigned conformism. This situation had been aptly summarised in *Mahābhārata,* Vana-parvan, 312,115:

Tārko 'pratiṣṭhaḥ ṣrutayo vibhinnāḥ
Naiko *ṛṣir* yasya vacaḥ pramāṇam

Dharmasya tattvam nihitaṁguhāyām
Mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ.
Reasoning is unstable and sacred texts diverge;
There is not one Sage whose word carries authority;
The essence of Religion is kept bound in a cave;
The path trod by the great ones is the path to follow.

A. The Current Interpretation of Śaṅkara's Teaching

The young saṇnyāsin who was to release the essence of the Religion from the cave of confusion appeared around 700 A.D. endowed with the best gifts which nature and *sādhanā* could provide: metaphysical genius, faultless acumen, dexterous logic, incomparable erudition and unshakable faith. Because of his exclusive faith in Śruti, he was to be a *Śrutivādin:* his writings would be commentaries *(bhāsya)* following the order of his basic texts, rather than systematic treatises. Due to his readiness to accommodate himself to the traditional modes of thought, he would use the predominantly *Sāṃkhya* language of speculation and fail to create many new terms to express his novel conceptions. Finally, the greatness of his name would induce paler imitators and even opponents to ascribe to him hundreds of spurious works which would not influence his immediate disciples but would falsify the interpretation of his doctrine by later followers.

On account of these three main factors: unsystematic presentation, inadequate vocabulary, influence of spurious works, there has arisen in India an interpretation of Śaṅkara which distorts his authentic teaching but has unfortunately been accepted by many. According to this *current interpretation,* the chief tenets of Advaitavāda (Non-Dualism) are the following:

1) *Brahma satyam jagad mithyā jīva brahmaiva nāparah.* This line, which is not from Śaṅkara but from *Bālabodhini*, a later short work falsely ascribed to him, means: "Brahman is reality, the world is false, the soul is only Brahman, nothing else." This is incessantly repeated in the belief that it expresses in a nutshell the whole teaching of Śaṅkara. According to it, the world is *māyā,* i.e., a purely illusory manifestation of Brahman, caused by transcendental Nescience (*Avidyā or Ajñāna*). Hence, *advaita* means strict monism and implies acosmism. The statements of identity, such as "Verily, this whole world is Brahman" *(Sarvaṃ khalv-idaṃ Brahma),* or "I

am Brahman" *(Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi),* must be understood literally as they stand.

2) Brahman is the material cause of the world; this would imply that it is a sort of unconscious stuff which becomes modified according to the variety of "names and forms". But this causal self-modification is illusory *(vivarta).*

3) Brahman is *nirguṇa,* which would mean 'impersonal'. Hence, there is no possibility of establishing interpersonal relationships with it.

4) The *jīvātman* or soul which, in the state of avidyā, appears to itself as a finite principle of consciousness, activity and passivity, is really identical with Brahman, the Ātman of all. Senses and body are mere *upādhis* or superimpositions due to Nescience. The Śruti-revelation of advaita is alone capable of freeing *(mokṣa)* the jīvātman from the bond of Nescience. It cancels all other evidence and its realisation is absolute Bliss.

B. Saṅkara's Teaching in his Authentic Writings

The teaching of Śaṅkara has generally been interpreted in the light of the later advaitic tradition. However, in recent times, critical scholarship has been seeking more and more decisively to discover his original views through a fresh and unbiased study of his genuine works.

The list of the writings in his name comprises 433 titles, 107 of which merely duplicate for another 69; 219 do not enjoy unanimous recognition by his school whereas 214 do. Modern scholars, however, reject most of them as spurious. Today, they usually agree that the following are genuine:

1) the commentaries *(bhāṣya)* on nine Upaniṣads: *Bṛhadāranyaka* (BAU), *Chāndogya* (CU), *Aitareya* (AU), *Taittirīya* (TU), *Īṣa* (IU), *Kena* (KU), *Kaṭha* (KAU), *Praṣna* (PU), *Muṇḍaka* (MUU);

2) the commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā* (BhG);

3) the commentary on the *Brahma-* or *Vedānta-sūtra* (BS).

4) a non-commentarial treatise, the *Upadeśa-sāhasrī* (US).

The attribution to Śaṅkara of a commentary on the *Māṇḍakya* (actually a *vivarana* on its *Āgama-śāstra)* continues to be disputed and cannot be used safely.

There exist a *Śaṅkara Dig-vijaya* and other "Lives" of Śaṅkara, but they date from at least five centuries after his time (He flourished probably during the first half of the 8th century A.D.) and are too legendary to be trusted as history.

It is, therefore, only from his writings that we can attempt to derive an informed idea of Śaṅkara's personality. The modern development of hermeneutics provides a fruitful way of doing this: we shall distinguish in his writings the **textual** and the **paratextual.** The "textual" is all that depends directly on the texts he commented upon; the "paratextual" comprises his personal predispositions, opinions, principles which are at work in his commenting but are not commanded directly by his sources. It includes both the manifestations of his temperament, such as his mental clarity, retentive memory and intellectual genius, and the marks of his religious and monastic formation.

After drawing our attention to the paratextual endowment of Śaṅkara, we shall assimilate better the textual substance of his writings.

1. Śaṅkara's hermeneutical predispositions

Śaṅkara approached his task of commentator of the *Brahmasūtra* and the *Upaniṣads* with some remarkable predispositions. As a religious man, he was a complete renouncer, a *parama-haṁsa saṁnyāsin.* As a scholar, he had given his allegiance to the *Vedānta darśaṇa,* but this did not make his culture exclusive. His writings exhibit a precise acquaintance with the whole landscape of philosophico-religious thinking as developed up to his time and with a very large number of the writings then extant. As a reader, he was a *vivekin,* a discerner, always hunting for the truth, ready to reject but also to accept in accordance with the axiom he quotes on BS 2.4.12, "the teaching of others, if not inconsistent with our own, becomes an accompaniment of our own thinking" *(paramatam-apratiṣiddham-anumatam bhavati).* But what he sought was exclusively the **Excellent;** he shunned the rest:

> As [according to Indian folklore] the flamingo sifts milk alone from a mixture of water and milk, so the wise man sifts the excellent from the merely pleasant, going mentally all around these two objects, examining them closely, weighing their respective importance or futility; and, having distinguished them,

he chooses the excellent alone on account of its superiority (on *Kaṭha* Up. 2.2).

He was convinced that we are born with a radical sort of ignorance *(naisargika-avidyā)* which makes us superimpose the nature and attributes of the Absolute upon the relative and *vice versa.* It is like taking a rope for a snake, but it means giving a central importance to our little self and treating our transcendent Ground *(pratiṣṭhā),* inner Witness *(sākṣin)* and inner Ruler (*antar-yāmin)* as a mere object or correlative entity. It vitiates all our thinking and behaviour. Indeed, we view ourselves and things as so many monads, independent, self-sufficient and valuable by themselves, and if at all we think of the supreme Lord, it is to consider him as a means, a cosmic servant like the *devas,* instead of our Illuminer, inner Ruler and true End.

However, he was also convinced that there is in every human being a desire for knowledge *(jijñāsā)* which cannot be satiated short of intuiting the very Brahman:

> The direct object of the said desire is a knowledge culminating in intuition (*avagati-paryanatam jñānam)*...for this intuition of the Brahman **is the end of man** *(brahmāvagati hi puruṣārthaḥ).* (on BS 1.1.1)

And Jaimini had defined *puruṣārtha* as "that object to which human desire is inherently attached because it cannot be disconnected from it" (MS 4.1.2).

Śaṅkara had possibly composed earlier a commentary on the *Yoga-sūtra* (discovered some 25 years ago), so he knew well the difference between knowledge as received from teachers and knowledge as interiorized; the first he sometimes called simple *jñāna* and the second *vijñāna*, truly discerning knowledge:

> *Jñāna* means the enlightenment regarding the Ātman, etc. as obtained from the teaching and the teacher; *vijñāna* is the experiencing of that *(tad-anubhava)* in its specificity (on BG 3.41). It means turning it into a personal experience (*svānubhava karaṇa)* (ibid.6.8).

But this could not be done easily unless one had first ascertained *(pūrvasiddhi)* the truth of that teaching through a thorough rational questioning *(manana)* lest one would interiorize untruth (cf. *Upadeśa Sāhasrī* 18:125 and 126). This prior ascertaining would be the chief aim of his commentaries.

Not only in virtue of his allegiance to Vedānta but as a result of his study of other doctrines and of his self-immersing into the Upaniṣads, he believed that these were the only source of valid knowledge regarding the Brahman-Ātman.

> It is only with the help of the Śruti that this exceedingly deep Brahman can be fathomed, not of [independent] reasoning. (on BS 2.1.31)

In a better way than Jaimini he could justify the belief of all *śrutivādins* (scripturalists) in the eternality of the Śruti:

> The mantras, etc. are the Consciousness of the Ātman as limited by extrinsic adjuncts, namely, the modifications *(vṛtti)* of the inner sense, and as abiding in those vṛttis of this inner sense. Thus, of that Ātman they are the Knowledge that has neither beginning nor end (on TU 2.3).

He explains the connections between the śruti-texts and Brahman: That all-knowing, all-powerful Brahman, which is the Cause of the origin, subsistence and dissolution of the world, is known from the Vedānta-part of Scripture. How? Because in all the Vedānta-texts the sentences construe insofar as they have that [Brahman] as their purport (on BS 1.1.4).

But they presented difficulties for, speaking of the Transcendent, they could not use language in the manner of everyday usage *(vyavahāra)*. Often their words were meaningful only in their supreme sense, as when they said that the Brahman alone is [eminently] Existent or is [causally and eminently] All or is One only without a second.[1] Again, at times they spoke of the Brahman in terms conforming to its transcendence but at other times in quite anthropomorphic terms. Śaṅkara was ready to face these difficulties with his own conception of intellection and of the sentence *(vākya)*, especially the definition *(lakṣaṇa.)*.

2. His conception of the sentence

For Śaṅkara, an assertive sentence is composed of a subject to be differentiated (*viśeṣya)* and predicates which differentiate it. These are not only the *viśeṣaṇas*, which are intrinsic characterizers, but also the *upādhis,* which are extrinsic characterizers. Both of them can define the subject but inequally.

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[1] Compare Jesus asking the rich man, "why do you call me good? Only one is [eminently] Good, God" or the Jewish scholar in Mark 12:34 telling him, "You said truly that He is [eminently] One and there is no other beside Him."

Defining, indeed, has two degrees: 1) setting the subject apart from all the rest, and 2) declaring its nature. Of the first, the *upādhis* are capable (as when a crystal cup standing near a red rose is pointed out as "that red cup",) but, of the second, only the *viśeṣaṇas* (as when a certain flower is defined as "big, blue, sweet-smelling lotus"). Cf. on TU 2.1.1.

Now, even with the help of these intrinsic attributes, a definition cannot always "express" the nature of the subject. There are cases when it can "only indicate" it because it transcends the expressive power of all terms. For instance, the metempirical Brahman, "it is defined by proper indication *(lakṣ-)* but not expressed *(vac-)*": *tal-lakṣyate na tūcyate* (ibid.). When interpreting a statement about it, attention must be paid to the nature of its subject and to its context, both proximate and remote.

3. His conception of intellection

"Knowledge results from the sources of valid knowing *(pramāṇa)* whose objects are the existent things as they are in reality *(yathā-bhūta vastu)*" (on BS 1.1.4). This objective identity *(yāthātmya)* is not easy to attain. Indeed, things have a physical substantiality, which sense-perception and inference can ascertain, but also a metaphysical depth, namely, their total dependence on their Cause. So long as we ignore, or deny, this dependence, our knowledge has not reached its *yāthātmya;* however correct it may be as far as it goes, it is *Avidya* for it lacks the complement and finality which the śruti alone can give. The śruti will not cancel its content but only its pretention of having reached exhaustively the yāthātmya of things:

> A hundred śrutis may declare that fire is cold or dark; still they possess no authority in the matter. Thus we should in no way attach to śruti a meaning which is opposed to other pramāṇas (on BG 18:66).

The *yathā* in *yāthātmya* suggests that knowledge must be similar to the things known. Not a few Indian thinkers held a mirror theory of knowledge as if its complexity reflected the very complexity of things. Śaṅkara had surmounted this naive realism. For him intellection is interpretation, either of the sense-data or of the successive words of sentences. The intellect has the power of "considering them as a whole" *(samasta praty-avamarśinī buddhiḥ:* on TU 2.3.). It is dynamically synthetic. It can unify all the indications it receives and it is by the synthetic unity of the resulting knowledge that the latter is similar to the known reality. This is important especially when it results from merely indicative terms.

4. His interpretation of the five types of definition of Brahman

Śaṅkara divides the upaniṣadic texts into units of teaching by discovering axial "great sentences" *(mahā-vākya)* subserved by ancillary sentences called *arthavāda.* These great sayings define the Brahman in various ways which can be grouped under five types. They are the negative, the superlative, the world-relational, the ego-relational and the essential definitions *(lakṣaṇa).* Each one corrects a special form of our innate ignorance and by their combination they eradicate it completely.

a) *The negative* (neti neti) *definition.* It sets the Brahman apart from all the other reals *(satya)* by telling us that "it is not so, not so" and that they are only its *upādhis* or extrinsic denominators:

> *Neti neti* designates the Brahman unaffected by its *upādhis,* which is beyond the grasp of speech and mind, undifferentiated and one (on BAU 3.8.12).

It teaches us that no term and no concept can **express** the Brahman because their expressive power is restricted to the empirical, whereas it is metempirical. Does *neti/neti* teach us the nothingness of the universe, as asserted by Maṇḍana Miśra?

> If you say, "what is prescribed here by the authority of this sentence is a nihilistic meditation *(nivṛtti),*" the answer is, "(indeed,) the Witness not having been positively established *(aprasiddhatvāt),* a void would result" (on US 18:125).

But *neti neti* is complemented by the next and the other definitions.

b) *The superlative definition: Brahman is Paramam (supreme), Brahman is Pūrṇam (Full).* This definition gives the reason for the first: it is because Brahman is Fullness of being, Supreme in every regard that it is unlike anything finite. It is *beyond* anything within our sphere of experience. Because we observe degrees of being, we have an idea of the maximal Being but no experience of it. Yet all the beings we know directly have a relation of similarity to it and can thus enrich our idea of it on the basis of the next two definitions.

c) *The world-relational definition: Brahman is that from which* (yataḥ) *these beings are born, that by which* (yena) *once born they live, that into which* (yat), *when departing, they enter* (TU 3.1.1).

i- *The absolute nirguṇa Brahman is the sole Cause of the cosmos:*

The full sense of that definition, explains Śaṅkara, is: "That omniscient, omnipotent Cause from which proceed the origin, subsistence and resorption of this world,... the nature of whose arrangement cannot even be conceived by the mind, is Brahman."

> The highest Brahman only is the evolving agent... That the highest Lord is he who evolves the names-and-forms is a principle acknowledged by all the Upaniṣads (on BS 2.4.20).

Brahman is Cause in two ways, as *yataḥ* and as *yena,* i.e., it provides both the reality (as *upādāna)* and the orderly structure and course of the cosmos (as its *nimitta—kāraṇa).* Brahman is its total principal Cause; all partial causes are dependent on and subordinated to it. But neither its causality nor its effects result in any change in Brahman; to it they are mere *upādhis.* It remains *kuṭastha*, firm as a Himalayan peak, unchanged and unchangeable, truly transcendent. But since it is actively giving reality and order from its own fullness, it is immanent and omnipresent not by external nearness but innermostly. It does this out of no necessity but gratuitously and freely:

> The supreme Ātman, due to "his **absolutely complete power"** (on BS 2.1.24), creates "like *devas,* etc. who, without availing themselves of any extraneous means, produce palaces, etc. **by their mere intention** which is effective in virtue of the peculiar power of these beings" (on BS 2.1.25). The Ātman's volitions are mere *upādhis*, not additive to his essence. Indeed, "how are they found in Brahman? As essentially Reality-Knowledge, and as pure in virtue of being their own Ātman" (on TU.2.6.1).

Now the question arises, is the Cause the *saguṇa* or the *nirguṇa* Brahman? Śaṅkara tells us that the first is the Brahman wrongly conceived as **having** qualities, etc. as complements of its substance, whereas as *nirguṇa* it is conceived correctly as **being** by essence whatever perfection we have to attribute to it. Being composed of substance plus complements such as qualities *(guṇa)* is proper to finite beings; it is foreign to the true Brahman which is free of such internal distinction (*akhaṇḍa/nirguṇa).* Cf. his commentary on BS 1.1.11 and 3,2,21. The highest Brahman is the *nirguṇa* and "it is of the highest Brahman that ether, etc. are understood to be the effects" (on BS 2.4.1).

But is creating not proper to *Īśvara* rather than to Brahman? The word '*īśvara*' is "the relational term 'lord of' (on BS 2.2.41). Śaṅkara attributes it **indifferently both** to the *nirguṇa* Brahman (for which lordship is a mere *upādhi)* and to the *saguṇa* Brahman, i.e., the Brahman as often spoken about in anthropomorphic fashion and thus incorrectly by the Upaniṣads. (2) WOOD (1990) has shown that the severance of the concept of *īśvara* from that of the Absolute which is currently taken as the most distinctive feature of MAU is based on a misreading by the author of its *vivaraṇa.* He read mantra 6, "*eṣa sarveśvara, eṣa sarvajña...*" as referring to mantra 5 and thus to the self in the deep sleep state instead of to mantra 7 and thus to the so-called *Caturtha* (Fourth), namely, the **absolute Ātman.** This unfortunate misreading has determined the current interpretation of Śaṅkara's teaching.

ii-*The relation of the creatures to their creative Cause:*

There is, he says, between the creatures and the Brahman "a relation (*sambandha)* which we reasonably define as *tādātmya,* having That as one's Ātman" (on BS 2.2.38). He characterizes it by the following properties:

(1) *non-reciprocity:* "Names-and-forms (the finite realities) in all their states have their Ātman in Brahman alone, but Brahman has not its Ātman in them" (on TU 2.6.1). It is their supreme 'Self' because it is their **innermost omniscient and total** Cause.

(2) *total dependence:* "It is an accepted principle even in the world that an effect is intimately dependent on its *[upādāna]* cause" (on BAU 1.5.14).

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[2] For instance, he equates Brahman or Ātman and Īśvara or Parameśvara in commenting on BS 2.3.41, 3.2.6, BAU 3.7.3, 4.4.15, CU 1.1.1, 5.18.1, KEU 3.1.2, KAU 2.2.13, BhG 11.36. He explains the *Tat* of *Tattvamasi* as Īśvara or Parameśvara on BS 1.2.13, 3.2.6. On BS 4.4.19 it is the Parameśvara whom he distinguishes as either *nirguṇa* or *saguṇa.*

(3) *non-separation:* "An effect is non-separate *(avyatirikta)* from its *(upādāna)* cause" (on BAU 1.6.1). "The non-separation of the two is possible only if the whole aggregate of things originates from the one Brahman; and we understand from the Veda that this assertion can be established only on the *[sat-kārya]* principle, namely, that between the *upādāna* or reality-giving cause and the effect there is non-separation,...non-division *(abheda)*" (on BS 2.3.6).
(4) *indwelling:* "All the created beings abide within the *Puruṣa* for every effect rests within its *[upādāna]* cause" (on BhG 8.22).
(5) *non-otherness (an-anyatva):* This term denotes here complete foreignness. "There exists in the past, present or future not one thing simply other than the Ātman, simply non-Ātman, separate by space or time, utterly subtle, disconnected and remote" (on IU 2.6.1). "The effect is non-other than the cause, i.e., apart from the cause, it is absent *(kāraṇa-vyatireken'-ābhāvah*" (on BS 2.1.14).
(6) *distinction and similarity:* "If [because of non-otherness] absolute equality were insisted on, the distinction of cause and effect would be annihilated...This relation is based on the fact that there is present in the cause an **excellence** [which the effect is lacking; on the other hand, they are similar since] one feature, namely, beingness (*sattā)*, is found in ether, etc. as well as in Brahman" (on BS 2.1.6).
(7) *extrinsic denominativeness (upādhitva):* Since they share in *sattā,* the effects are not illusory but with regards to Brahman they are neither intrinsic parts (such as qualities, modes or modifications) nor additive adjuncts but extrinsic indicators (due to their similarity to their Cause). They help us to name it as Lord of all, supreme Cause, inner Ruler, highest Self, etc. (all these creatorship-relations being themselves its *upādhis*).
(8) *finitude (alpatva)*: "That is infinite *(ananta)* which is not divided from, anything [but pervades] everything" (on TU 2.1.1); the Brahman alone is thus and may truly be called *bhūman* (infinite); each creature is limited by others and is thus small *(alpa)*, and may never be called *Sat* (Being) in the maximal sense.

So long as we fail to discern those properties of the *tādātmya* which relates the world to Brahman, we view it incorrectly as a *saṁsāra* of independent entities; the world itself is not false, not illusion *(māyā)* but our view of it is.

d) *The ego-relational* (tat-tvam-asi) *definition.*

"From ordinary experience, the ego (*jīvātman)* is known to everyone as the agent, enjoyer [and knower]" (on BS 1.3.7). But its *tādātmya* relation with Brahman is not thus known. The *Śruti* teaches it through "That thou art" (CU 6.9.4 sq.) which US 18 explains best through the method of agreement and difference:

> Just as in the expression 'the black horse', 'black' excludes all non-blacks even if they are horses and 'horse' excludes all non-horses even if they are black, so in *Tat-tvam-asi*, the words *Sat* [for Tat] and *tvam,* which refer to one and the same entity, function like 'black' and 'horse'. Through being put together with *Sat* which expresses absence of misery, *tvam* [loses its connotation of misery and] is left with the meaning *Sat*. Similarly, *Sat,* through its apposition with a word signifying 'inner self' (*pratyag-ātman)* [is left with the meaning 'inmost Self'] (US 18. 170-171). Without giving up their proper meaning *(svārtha), tvam,* and *Tat/Sat* convey a special meaning [namely, innermost and uppermost Self] and they lead to immediate awareness of the inmost Ātman. **Apart from this meaning, there can be no other one which would not result in a contradiction** (ibid. 173).

Thus "That thou art" defines the Brahman as our Ātman, but what should we understand the ego or jīvātman to be?

> This appropriator [that says 'I' and 'mine'] is the ego-sense which always stands (mirrorlike) in proximity to that [Ātman which is pure Awareness] and acquires a reflection of it *(tad ābha).* Hence, there arises this intrication of *Ātman* and *ātmīya* (that whose Ātman it is) which is the sphere of application of the words 'I' and 'mine.'...It is because the ego-sense bears a reflection *ābhāsa)* of the Ātman that it is designated by words [such as 'I' or 'Thou'] pertaining to the Ātman...
>
> The reflection of the Ātman in the ego-sense is comparable to the reflection of a face [in a mirror]. As in the case of the face, the Ātman is other *(anya),* says the tradition, and the two [Ātman and its reflection] are likewise undiscriminated *(ibid.* 27 and 31-33).

Why are they so? Because of the similarity, closeness and intimate dependence of the reflection on its original, the Ātman. But it is also on account of the same similarity, etc. that *tattvamasi* can lead to the correct discerning, the reflection being "the door" *(dvāra: ibid.)* across which our mind apprehends the Prototype *Tat,* provided *tattvamasi* be well understood. "There is no other door to its recognition" (on KEU 2.4).

Being only a reflection, the ego is not a product. If it were it would be impermanent and resorbable into its substantive cause *(upādāna)* instead of being releasable from nescience (on BS 2.2.42 and 2.3.17).

It has the Brahman-Ātman as its "own form" *(svarūpa)*, its fundamental essence *(svabhāva)* but as reflection within its *upādhis* (the inner sense comprising intellect, ego-sense and mind). "It is conditioned and coloured by the core of qualities *(guṇa-sāra)* of the intellect, etc." Due to these extrinsic adjuncts *(upādhi-nimitta)*, it appears as an individual thinker, doer and enjoyer existing in the saṁsāra (on BS 2.3.29, 32, 40). This superimposition, we may remember, is innate. It prevents the fundamental nature of the ego to be known without the help of the śruti. How to explain this innate condition?

> It is brought about through the permission of the Lord who is the highest Self, the superintendent of all actions, the witness residing in all beings, the cause of all intelligence. And we must therefore assume that final release also is effected through knowledge caused by the grace of the Lord *(īśvara-prasāda-hetukena vijñānena)*. Why so? Because the śruti teaches it (on BS 2.3.41).

That permission of the Lord is itself a favour whose result is our person as a well-integrated individual:

> Just as the milk-testing gem imparts its lustre to milk, so the light of the Ātman—which is subtler than the intellect or heart—through being within the heart, UNIFIES *(ekī-karoti)* and imparts its lustre to the body and the organs including the heart, etc....The intellect, being diaphanous and next to the Ātman, becomes the reflection *(ābhāsa)* of the Consciousness-light of the Ātman...Then this reflection illumines the mind *(manas)*,....then the senses....and finally the body...It is always through the favour of the light of the Ātman that all our activities take place...for every act of man is referred to his ego which results from that illumination (on BAU 4.3.7).

BS 2.3.43 raises the question, is the connection between the highest Brahman and the individual soul only of one sort, namely, as between a master and his servant, or also like that between a fire and its parts, the sparks?

> The soul must be considered a part of the Lord...But by "part" we mean "a part as it were", since a being not composed of parts

cannot have parts in the literal sense. Why, then, do we not view the Lord, who is not composed of parts, as identical with the soul? **'On account of the declaration of difference.'** [Three texts are mentioned here.] These texts would be inappropriate if there were no difference (on BS 2.3.43).

Thus instructed about the two modes of its connection with the highest Ātman, its Lord and Whole, the reflection-soul aspires more definitely to know the very divine Essence it reflects.

e) *The essential* SATYAM JñĀNAM-ANANTAM *definition* (TU 2.1.1).

This time the Brahman is not defined in relation to its effects but in itself. Its essence *(svarūpa)* is REALITY-KNOWLEDGE INFINITE.

Since Brahman transcends genus and difference, "each term is independently connected with the term Brahman." But "by virtue of their mutual contiguity, they are controlled by, and controlling, each other, and thus they exclude from that [Brahman] their expressive meaning *(vācyārtha)* and become the indicatives *(laksnārtha)* of Brahman." However, "they certainly do not lose their proper meaning *(svārtha)*."

The proper meaning of SATYAM is being, true and stable reality: "its primary denotation *(mukhyārtha)* is 'existence' as common to all external things." Does it then mean here that Brahman is permanent and solid reality, like the earth? No, it is not material reality, because *satyam* is accompanied with *jñānam.*

The proper meaning of JñĀNAM is "knowing *(jñapti),* awareness *(avabodha)*...Its proper denotation consists of whatever is appropriated by the intellect and expresses the reflections *(ābhāsa)* of that [Brahman]. But here "because it determines Brahman along with SATYAM and ANANTAM (INFINITE)" it must be understood in its supreme sense *(paramārtha)* as perfect actuality of its root *jña-* (know) [i.e., not as restricted into particular meanings, such as knower, activity of knowing, piece of knowledge, but as infinite "Know"]. Similarly, ANANTAM infinitizes SATYAM which JñĀNAM has already dematerialized. And, since "that which is infinite is not divided from anything else," the two terms SATYAM-JñĀNAM coalesce to indicate the spiritual essence of Brahman as free of any inner distinction and composition.

Thus, through the supreme meaning of SATYAM-JñĀNAM, "the Brahman is indicated but not expressed (*laksyate na tu+ucyate*)" (all above quotations from Śaṅkara's commentary on TU 2.1.1).

This is the upaniṣadic way along which Śaṅkara led his pupils to "the Brahman whose essence is KNOWLEDGE-BLISS, the GOAL of the man who stands knowing It" (BAU 3.9.28). Through the negative definitions, he had raised their minds above all the empirical realities; through the superlative ones, focused them on the transempirical Fullness. Then, through the relational definitions, especially TAT-TVAM-ASI, and the essential ones, he made them understand the positive Absolute without whose previous ascertainment the pupils would have had nothing to "interiorize and experience by themselves" (*sva+anubhava-karana).*

This beatifying experience of the divine Essence is a "discerning knowledge" which, as we saw, is "caused *(hetuka)* by the Lord's grace" (on BS 2.3.41; also on TU 1.11.4). It is not a change of the nature of the soul but a 'change of mind' from nescience to awareness:

> It is in that internal organ once pure that the Ātman reveals Himself distinctly (on MUU 3.1.9; BAU 4.4.19).

For purifying the mind, "hearing and pondering are not enough without hankering *(varanena);* not needed, however, is any other means but prayer alone *(prārthana+eva)* for the Ātman is by his nature ever attained [and only to be discerned]" (on MUU 3.2.3).

Discerning the Brahman-Ātman directly *(sāksāt)* satiates our radical desire *(brahma-jijñāsā)*—because it is Fullness—and even every desire; past renunciation becomes enjoyment:

> The knower of Brahman enjoys all desires, all delights procured by desirable objects, without exceptions. Does he enjoy sons, paradises, etc. alternately as we do? No, he enjoys all delectable things simultaneously, as amassed together in a single moment, which is eternal,...which is non-different from the essence of Brahman, and which we have described as REALITY-KNOWLEDGE INFINITE... He enjoys all things by the Brahman whose nature is omniscience (on TU 2.1.1).

Conclusion

Advaita Vedānta is pure transcendentalism. Its only concern is the "goal of man", namely, to intuit the very essence of the highest Brahman. The truth it distils from the Upaniṣads is that this Brahman is the highest Lord and highest Ātman of all the beings of the universe because it is their total Cause. In the richness of its unspeakable Fullness it exceeds all that we are or can wish to attain because it is Reality-Knowledge-Infinite and therefore absolute Bliss. Its effects can add nothing to its infinity, they exist through its causal presence within them, they are inseparable from it and cannot be counted apart from it. As to their reality it is neither Being nor Non-being in the supreme sense of those terms *(Sad-Asad-vilakṣaṇa)*; it is the reality of a totally dependent effect *(sat-kārya)*. Hence, their connection with the Brahman is not duality but non-duality *(advaita)* which is not the same as monism *(ekatva)*. They are similar to it, its reflections *(ābhāsa)*, but cannot be reckoned with it under one common genus, for the Brahman transcends any genus and is therefore "One without a second" *(ekam-eva+advitīyam)*.

S. Samartha, an outstanding CSI theologian, remarked: "there is no particular reason why the Church in India should be so hesitant to recognize Śaṅkara" (Samartha:1974, 167). Our inculturation into advaita categories is more important and less open to misunderstanding by the Hindus than that into *bhakti* categories and the interpretation of Christ as avatāra. Śaṅkara "draws together God, world and man in a single conception of (non-dualistic) unity" (170) "within the everlasting process that has its beginning, sustenance and end in Brahman" (191). Similar conceptions mark the progress of Christian thought from the Greek and Latin Fathers to the medieval and modern theologians, whether Aquinas, Bonaventure, Rahner or Tillich, not to speak of Robinson and a host of others. Advaita did not develop the non-Sanskritic conception of "person" which is generally misunderstood by Hindus, but in its authentic and traditional Christian understanding it is quite congenial to Advaita. A more openminded attention to Śaṅkara's conception of the ego would help us deepen our awareness of our creaturely dependence while his intellectual dynamism toward intuiting the divine Essence would interiorize our faith, vitalize our hope and nourish the hankering of our love. Christ, we believe, is man's saving Lord, both historical and cosmic: this affirmation holds together the Absolute, nature and history in a way which can illuminate and be illuminated by the advaita conception provided the latter be grasped in its authenticity.

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Chapter 5

Rāmānuja and Madhva

(R. De Smet)

1. Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita or Non-Dualism of the Internally Differentiated Brahman

Three centuries separate Rāmānuja from Śaṅkarācārya. We are reasonably certain that he was born in the region of Madras during the second half of the 11th century and died at Śrī Raṅgam after a long and fruitful career, probably in 1137.

Rāmānuja holds a distinguished place among the moulders of Hinduism proper. Hinduism is not identical with Brahmanism but the result of a long process of mutual accommodation between various brands of revived Brahmanism and other more or less orthodox trends, eminent among which are those of the *Bhakti* sects. This process, begun around 400 A.D. under the Gupta kings, reaches its essential accomplishment in the writings of Rāmānuja.

From the moment when Śaṅkara's interpretation of the Upaniṣads had restored to India its old metaphysical thought, a desire had naturally arisen in all religious scholars, however different their respective allegiances, to amalgamate their own tenets with the Upaniṣadic doctrine. Some followers of his transcendental non-dualism emphasised certain aspects of his doctrine concerning the relationship between the world and its Cause. From the end of the 9th century, the terms *'māyāvāda'* (illusionism) and *'vivartavāda'* (illusory self-modificationism) were introduced whereas they had been carefully avoided by Śaṅkara for, in his own time, they designated Buddhist theories which he rejected. P. Hacker has clarified this somewhat disfiguring development which changed Śaṅkara's transcendentalism into acosmism. It explains why Śaṅkarism became more and more intensely criticized by those who retained a real distinction between nature and finite *ātmans* on the one hand and *Brahman* on the other hand. On some form of this distinction depended the *bhakti*-relationship between individual souls and the individualised and even internally diversified (*viśiṣṭa*) Great Lord or *Brahman*. The reaction of the *Bhaktas* against Śaṅkarism reached its peak in the writings of Rāmānuja.

Rāmānuja, indeed, belonged to that group of scholars who meant to remain loyal to the anthropomorphic theism propagated by the various *bhakti*-sects. According as their devotion was directed to Śiva, Viṣṇu or Nārāyana, those sects were differentiated as Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism or Pāñcarātra. Rāmānuja himself was a Vaiṣṇava and it is the good fortune of Vaiṣṇavism to have found in him early enough the theologian of genius who could amalgamate it with Upaniṣadic wisdom.

A. The Method of Rāmānuja

In its essentials the method of Rāmānuja conforms with that of Śaṅkara; yet there are differences, some of them so important that the very character of his own doctrine depends upon them.

Since he is also a śrutivādin, he agrees with Śaṅkara in considering *Śruti* and especially its *jñānakāṇḍa,* i.e., the Upaniṣads, as the supreme and infallible *pramāṇa* or source of valid knowledge, and *Smṛti*, or human traditions, as merely ancillary to *Śruti,* in so far as it corroborates the latter. This is clearly stated in *Śribhāṣya,* 2. 1. 1, where he also accepts the restrictive rule of Jaimini that "*smṛti* is to be disregarded whenever it militates against *Śruti* in its primary meaning." Thus, for instance, he rejects with Śaṅkara *Kapilasmṛti,* i.e., *Sāṃkhyakārikā,* and *Bṛhaspatismṛti.* However, not only does he welcome like Śaṅkara *Manusmṛti* and *Mahābhārata*, especially the *Mokṣadharma* and the *Bhagavadgītā,* but also such later texts as *Āastambīyadharmasūtra, Dakṣasmṛti* and above all *Viṣṇupurāṇa.* This is a clear sign that his Upaniṣadic outlook is strongly coloured by his sectarian allegiance.

In his treatment of *Śruti* he is much less radical than Śaṅkara in wielding the criterion of primacy and secondariness. For him the *jñānakāṇḍa* is superior to the *karmakāṇḍa,* but not absolutely autonomous. In the *jñānakāṇḍa* itself, the declaratory statements are superior to the injunctions *(vidhi)* in so far as they convey the most precious knowledge concerning *Brahman,* but they can still be construed as *anuvādas* (auxiliary statements) of those *vidhis* insofar as that very knowledge is *for the sake of* perfect worship, which is an activity *enjoined by Śruti.*

Further, all the declaratory statements are of equal authority. Śaṅkara's distinction between major *(mahāvākya)* and minor statements is not justified. *Mahāvākyas* are simply purificatory statements *(śodakavākyas)*. They simply deny that *Brahman* is affected by a number of specified imperfections and thereby assert that It possesses the opposite perfections; hence they are not privileged.

The most important difference between Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja concerns their method of interpreting those "great" or "purificatory" statements. For Śaṅkara they cannot properly be understood apart from *lakṣaṇā*, a process which alone permits us to attain to the supreme meaning *(paramārtha)* of their terms and thus to grasp the supreme subsistent Perfection in its absolute unity and simplicity. On the other hand, their primary meaning, which is mundane, carries with itself the relative character of finite substances which *have* qualities, a character altogether foreign to *Brahman* which simply *is* all perfect qualities. For Rāmānuja *lakṣaṇā* is entirely to be avoided, and the primary meaning of those statements is the only correct one.

Besides, Rāmānuja denies the very possibility of interpreting them through *lakṣaṇā*. In this denial his merciless criticism of Śaṅkara's *bhāsya* on *Taittirīya-upaniṣad*, 2.1 betrays a certain lack of metaphysical acumen, while at the same time marking him as more conservative than Śaṅkara in his fidelity to the precepts of *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā*. Modelling reality too closely upon the pattern of human language and thought, he maintains that all judgments and propositions are ineradicably relational and that this is a sign that no reality can be perfectly simple. The relational unity, called *sāmānādhikaraṇya*, which binds predicate and subject in every judgement, can never be overcome by pure unity, as Śaṅkara maintained. Pure unity is simply unthinkable.

Hence, to the logical relation of attribute *(viśeṣaṇa)* and subject *(viśeṣya)*, there corresponds, on the plane of reality, the relational unity of effect *(upādeya)* and immanent cause *(upādāna)*, of part *(aṃśa)* and universal whole *(aṃśin)*, of accessory *(śeṣa)* and principal *(śeṣin)*, of quality *(guṇa)* and substance *(dravya)*, of thing controlled *(niyāmya)* and inner controller *(niyantṛ)*, and, more generally, of mode *(prakāra)* and modified substratum *(prakārin)*.

This notion of "mode-modified relationship" *(prakrāraprakāri-bhāva)* is the key-concept which commands the whole development of Rāmānuja's doctrine.

B. The Doctrine of Rāmānuja

Reality is in fact one undivided *(apṛthak) Brahman,* but far from being absolutely simple, as Śaṅkara pretended, it is internally complex *(viśiṣṭa).* The more obvious distinction to be made is the threefold distinction between (a) the unconscious *(acit)* universe of material *Prakṛti* (Nature), (b) the conscious *(cit)* community of finite *ātmans,* and (c) their Cause and Lord *(Īśvara), Brahman* in its own transcendence. Hence, we can speak of three Reals, though strictly of one Reality only.

To understand how one Reality can thus be complex, we had better start from the complexity of our own individual reality. We are, indeed, made up of a body *(deha)* and an embodied soul *(dehin).* Rāmānuja defines the body as "that substance which a conscious entity can use and support entirely for its own purposes, and which in its essence is exclusively subordinate *(śeṣa)* to that entity" *(Shrībhāṣya,* 2. 1. 9). The main property of a soul is *jñāna,* understood widely as thought, emotion and will. The soul transcends the body, but the body is one with it as its natural instrument, accessory, effect, mode, field of action *(kṣetra)* and dominion.

This microcosmic harmony of soul and body is a perfect analogy of the macrocosmic harmony of Lord and world. Material *Prakṛti* is the gross body of the Lord, the transmigrating souls his subtle body, the liberated souls his blissful body. He evolves them freely by self-modification *(pariṇāma),* rules them internally as their *antaryāmin* (inner ruler), and thus uses them for his own purpose, the perfect worship of his own glory.

The Lord. The proper nature of this transcendent Soul of the universe is itself complex. It is the ultimate substance, Viṣṇu. It *is not* but *has* an infinite number of most excellent qualities. Besides, it has an individual body of its own, perfectly attuned to that transcendence. This body is eternally stable in its perfect actuality. It is self-luminous and unsurpassed in beauty, sweetness, youthfulness and strength. It is free from the two disturbing components of matter, which are *rajas* (the activating element) and *tamas* (the obscuring and thickening element), and can best be described as pure *sattva* (the glorifying element closest to spirituality). It is from this pure body that the three bodies which constitute the world of *prakṛti* and dependent *ātmans* radiate as it were, and the Lord's ruling compenetration of them embodies him again in an *antaryāmin*-body as sattvic as the first. Further, for the sheer delight of souls, he graciously expresses himself in four *vyūha*-bodies, respectively as *Vāsudeva* (who displays his six main attributes), *Saṃkarṣaṇa* (who displays only the first two: knowledge and power), *Pradyumna* (who displays only the middle two: lordly independence and heroism), and *Aniruddha* (who displays the last two: might and splendour). As to those souls which are still enmeshed in error, he mercifully grants them the sight and company of his *avatāra*-bodies, coming down to them in human or infra-human forms, and even comes to reside with an *ārcā*-body (a body for worship) in those ammonite stones *(sālagrāma)* which are worshipped as the idols of Viṣṇu.

Through this theory of manifold divine bodies, Rāmānuja integrates the whole of Epic and purānic lore on the basis of his definition of the Lord as an internally differentiated Absolute (*Viśiṣṭa-brahman*).

Whereas the migrating souls find themselves embodied on account of their *karma*, it is out of his absolute freedom that the Lord ensouls the many bodies which mirror the unique splendour of his individual natural body; such embodying is no stain upon his perfection.

In his very substance he is spirit, an infinite spirit endowed with consciousness and free will. Hence, he is a person and capable of entering into personal relations with all souls, whether released or in bondage. Not only is he omniscient and omnipotent, but, through his ensouling power and his providence, he is also all-pervasive. He is not only just and disinterested but merciful and magnanimous as well. His grace can destroy the infinite debt of *karma,* the source of all evil, and this justifies his free decree of letting the souls shape their own destiny through actions for which they are morally responsible.

Prakṛti or Nature. Nature is that mode or body of the Lord which, from time without beginning, he freely makes to emanate in conformity with the *karma* of the equally beginningless souls. It is therefore produced as a mere instrument to serve the purpose of the souls. Being but a solidification of their *karma, Prakṛti* mirrors their inner guilt, it fascinates them and thus makes them experience the vanity of the pleasure or sorrow which accompanies their enjoyment of the fruits of their actions; despairing then of those results of their selfishness, they will turn to the Lord as to their real aim and ideal. This purpose of nature explains why it is not pure *sattva,* but made of *rajas* and *tamas* as well, and why the series of its self-modifications goes down from the sattvic intellect *(mahant* or *buddhi*) to the mainly tamasic gross elements.

Through this theory of nature as the gross body of the Lord, Rāmānuja succeeds in submitting to *advaita* the whole *sāṃkhya* philosophy.

The souls. Souls are of three kinds: (a) actually migrating and subject to *Prakṛti,* (b) liberated, and (c) ever free. All are without beginning or end. The last two kinds are in the contentment of divine bliss. In virtue of their *karma,* migrant souls are embodied either as gods, or as men, beasts, or plants. Embodiment, therefore, is not of the nature of souls but is accidental.

Compared to the Lord, souls are but one of his modes, and as univocal to him as sparks to fire. Like him, they are characterised by knowledge. In their genuine state their consciousness opens upon him alone, but when bound within the body, this consciousness gets focused through the senses on the material world. Two factors help the soul free itself from this bondage: (1) the dissatisfaction or even disgust which association with the world is meant to, and invariably does, produce in them, and (2) the grace of the Lord. If they consent to respond to the detaching influence of these two powerful factors, they find their selfishness driven away and their genuine orientation upon the Lord completely restored, so that they spend the rest of their present life in his worship, and pass from this life into the eternal worship of his majesty, which is pure unchanging bliss.

Conclusion

Rāmānuja fulfils our desire for a philosophy of man and nature. This philosophy is highly religious, since it naturally produces that flowering forth of acts of enlightened faith and selfless love and that intensely personal relationship between man and God which constitute active religion.

Yet it cannot fully satisfy the religious heart which craves for a God altogether transcendent and absolute, even in his most intimate immanence in his creatures, the God, indeed, of Śaṅkara and Christianity. Rāmānuja's personalism falls short in its application both to the knowing subjects of this world, and to God. Indeed, to be truly a 'person', a being must not only be endowed with intellectual consciousness and free will, but should also exist in itself, in its own wholeness. That which is a mere part in a whole is never a person. But, on the one hand, in Rāmānuja's opinion, finite subjects should consider the whole aggregate of their body and senses as entirely extrinsic and foreign to themselves, and their very selves as mere parts *(aṃṣa)* of the Lord. On the other hand, the Lord is not supposed to be complete without his modes, whether qualities or bodies, and thus falls short of that radical transcendence which is the mark of divine personality.

But these deficiencies of Rāmānuja's personalism are of the domain of metaphysics and failed to appear clearly to most of those Vedāntins who felt inclined to worship Brahman as Viṣṇu. They found his teaching highly congenial to the intimations of their hearts and his way of *bhakti* worship appealing and easy to tread by men and women whether of refined or of simple mind. This is why, through Rāmānuja's journeys across Southern and Western India, the kind of Vaiṣṇavism which he preached took strong roots and began to flourish extensively.

2. Madhva's Saviśeṣadvaita or Dvaita (Dualism)

Madhva (1199-1278 more probably than 1238-1317, as proposed by some scholars) was born near Udipi in South Kanara, and died there as the head of a new order of Vaiṣṇava renouncers founded by him. As a young saṇnyāsin he had been trained in Śaṅkara's advaita, but soon broke away to evolve a theological system of his own, opposed to Śaṅkarism in its main tenets. In order to buttress this system he relied upon the whole *Śruti* and *Smṛti.* Thus, without neglecting the Upaniṣads, he had recourse to the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas much more intensely than his predecessors, and he extended the notion of authoritative *Smṛti* to much of the purāṇic literature, especially to *Bhāgavata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇas* and to *Pāñcarātra Tantra;* but, a strict Vaiṣṇava, he insisted that Śaiva literature should be re-interpreted in the light of the cardinal conclusions of Vaiṣṇava literature.

Madhva was a prolific writer and 37 works are attributable to him. In all of them he repeatedly refuted Śaṅkarism as represented by an already long tradition, but, strange to say, there is hardly any argumentation of his which may be interpreted as a direct attack against Rāmānuja. His followers, however, would not fail to attack the essence of Rāmānujism.

A. Madhva's Doctrine

The problem of the one and the many is the fundamental problem in philosophy. One tendency is to stress unity *(abheda)*, the other to stress difference *(bheda)*. Of course, any solution which excludes one of these two and retains only its opposite, fails to render an adequate account of reality. The Upaniṣads emphasise *abheda,* but the Vedas, Brāhmanas, Epics and Purāṇas give an important place to *bheda* as well. Śaṅkara follows the main trend of the Upaniṣads; Rāmānuja acknowledges the element of difference but reduces it to mere intrinsic modality of the substantial identity. Madhva is more radical and brings into its own the element of difference, by simply denying that there is a basic community of the very substance of the world, the souls and the Lord.

He sees clearly a fundamental truth, namely, that by the very fact that a being is itself, it is also different from all other beings. Inner unity implies distinction from all the rest. Things, therefore, are diverse by their very nature *(padārtha-svarūpatvād bhedasya).* "By seeing what Devadatta is, I see also that he is not a jar or another man." Such is the testimony of our outward and inward senses, and "What has thus been ascertained by the inner witness, can never be challenged" for "no *pramāṇa* has equal power with perception."

Consequently, Madhva teaches the famous "fivefold difference" between *(a)* Lord and souls, *(b)* Lord and world, *(c)* soul and souls, *(d)* souls and world, *(e)* each object of the world and all other objects.

This fivefold difference is such that it permits all kinds of extrinsic relationships between the diverse beings but leaves absolutely no room for a really intrinsic community in being, such as we affirm between Creator and creatures. In other words, finite beings do not derive their very being from the Infinite Lord, who therefore should in no way be called their *upādāna* cause. Yet they arise from what is entirely His, namely, *Prakṛti* . Consequently they are also entirely His, resting on Him, acting by Him, and totally governed by Him.

The Lord. The fundamental idea of the Lord is that of completely independent Being (*svatantra*). To be thus independent, He must be absolutely perfect. Indeed, although in His deepest essence He is pure consciouness *(tat sārabhūtam cinmātram)*, Hari, the Lord is *saviśeṣa*, i.e., He possesses an infinite number of most excellent differences *(viśeṣa)* which, though found distinct in other beings, are found in Him in perfect identity. In the same way, He even possesses a purely spiritual organism or body *(vigraha, deha)* and can manifest it at will in *vyūha* and *avatāra* bodies, while remaining one and undivided.

He is omnipotent in this sense that He has the means of developing any world He likes, not out of sheer necessity but, as it were, by manner of play. Hence, He possesses the eternal souls as well as the eternal *Prakṛti* and through them gives kinetic existence (*sattā*) to all particular beings. "Objects, deeds, time, natural dispositions and even souls 'are' (*santi*) by Him and are never without relation to Him." "Evolution, permanence, involution, direction, knowledge, rebirth, bondage, release, all these the Scriptures attribute to Hari." Hence, *Prakṛti* is a mere instrument in His hands. "He can even do without it what He does through it." Being such a complete efficient cause, Hari penetrates into the souls and resides there as their inner witness and guardian, and in Nature as its inner controller.

Nature. Prakṛti is characterized by sheer passive dependence *(paratantratva)*. It is true that it exists eternally and does not, therefore, owe its existence to the Lord, but its nature is to be a mere instrument totally docile to His pleasure.

The Souls. In contrast with material *Prakṛti* every soul is by essence a spiritual consciousness (*cidrūpa+eva hi sarve jīvāḥ*). It is, therefore, without parts, yet it possesses in its indivisible identity all the qualities which necessarily follow from spirituality, especially knowledge, activity and bliss, although these may be clouded during the time of embodiment.

It is, therefore, essentially similar to the Lord, yet dependent on Him and finite. He is the perfect model of which the soul is an image *(ābhāsa)*, a reflection *(pratibimba)*, or a 'broken off particle' *(bhinna+aṃśa)*, but it is a self-subsistent though dependent image *(nirupādhika)*.

Though the soul's activity may be said to be its own, the soul in this very activity remains entirely dependent *(asvatantra)* on the Lord. He is the immanent energiser of whatever the soul does, and the soul can but individualize or canalize, as it were, the all-embracing activity of the Lord. This is even more so in the state of release which precisely consists in the soul's perfect docility to the Lord.

Since otherness is a fundamental character of reality, there are various sorts of dependent spirits. "Dependent consciousness is twofold: either liable or not liable to pain. Rāmā *(Lakṣmī*, the consort of *Viṣṇu)* is eternally without pain. All other dependent spirits are liable to pain, whether already released or still in pain. Those still in pain are either suited or unsuited to release. Those unsuited to release have either gone to darkness or are forever migrating in *saṁsāra.*

This fate is not due to a choice of the Lord, nor does it depend upon the merits or demerits of the souls. It is a necessity of their very nature *(svabhāva)*, and this follows logically from the fundamental assumption of Madhva. Indeed, in a universe, the souls and nature of which are not created by the Lord, but which still is a full universe, there must be all possible sorts of souls, and the above classification is the complete one. The equanimity *(samatva)* then, or justice of the Lord, consists in treating the souls exactly according to what their nature demands. As to His mercifulness, it is not demanded that He be gracious towards those of a nature either evil *(asura)* or unreleasable, but only that He deign to hasten the release of the releasable souls. This He does by turning their gaze inwards upon their true nature, which is a pure mirror of Himself; in this way He makes them practise all good works and, especially, that *bhakti* of complete dependence which is but a recovery of their nature.

Conclusion

A superficial reading of Madhva's writings may give the impression that his doctrine is very close to Christian philosophy. Guided by this impression some have been tempted to postulate a measure of Christian influence upon his thought, especially with regard to his doctrine of absolute "predestination". But we have shown how every point of his teaching is deduced logically from the combination of his two fundamental assertions: that separateness *(bheda)* is of the very nature of being, and that the Lord cannot be Creator in the strict sense of the term. The second assertion is linked with the first, in so far as Madhva could not reconcile the perfect transcendence, and therefore absolute separateness of the Lord with the possibility of His creating other beings as their *upādāna* cause.

Madhva, however, is to be praised for his very religious view of the universe. It is, indeed, by abdicating all claim of selfish independence and by willingly abandoning our soul into the merciful hands of God that we shall save it.

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Chapter 6

God in Hinduism: Brahman, Paramātman, Īśvara and Bhagavān

(P. Fallon)

Brahmeti Paramātmeti Bhagavāniti Śabdyate (Bhāgavata)
(The Supreme Reality is called Brahman, Paramatman, Bhagavan.)

A. Pantheism, Idolatry, Monotheism?

A Christian student of Hinduism may be, at first, repelled by the apparent pantheism of its philosophy and bewildered by the seeming polytheism of its religion. Do Hindu thinkers admit the existence of a Supreme Being, both absolute and personal, transcendent to, as well as immanent in, the world? Do Hindu devotees and religious souls believe in One God, Creator and Ruler of the world, dwelling in their hearts and calling them to a life of eternal and blissful communion with Him? All over India, Hindus speak of Īśvara or Parameśvara, Paramātman, Brahman, Puruṣottama or Bhagavān; can Christians use these words to designate the One True God whom they adore and preach?

Hindu 'polytheism' and 'idolatry' will be examined and discussed in subsequent chapters; there is much in Hindu thought and beliefs that cannot be reconciled with Christian philosophy and religion. But an intimate acquaintance with Hindu philosophical and religious literature, as well as with the living devotion of the Hindu masses, will soon reveal that, transcending the monism of many a philosophical system and underlying the very idolatry of popular devotion, a deep and lofty idea of God has, all through the history of Hinduism, acted as a corrective against the rationalistic conceptualisations of the *darśanikas* (philosophers) and the mythological anthropomorphisms of the *bhaktas* (devotees).

Some examples will make this clear. Rabindranath Tagore's religious hymns have become immensely popular among large sections of the Hindu middle-classes. In their original Bengali, or in English as well as in numerous translations in other Indian vernaculars, these hymns often express a pure and theistic devotion:

Day after day, O lord of my life, shall I stand before thee face to face. With folded hands, O lord of all worlds, shall I stand before thee face to face.

> Under thy great sky in solitude and silence, with humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face.
> In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil and with struggle, among hurrying crowds shall I stand before thee face to face.
> And when my work shall be done in this world, King of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face.
>
> *(Gitanjali, No. 76)*

Tagore belonged to the Brāhmo-Samāj, a reformed sect whose theism, though fed on the Upaniṣads, was not free from Western and Christian influences. But, three centuries before Tagore, Tukaram sang:

A beggar at Thy door, pleading I stand;
Give me an alms, O God, Love from Thy loving hand.
Spare me the barren task to come, and come for nought;
A gift poor Tuka craves, unmerited, unbought,
Ah! do not cast on me the guilt of mine iniquity;
My countless sins, I, Tuka, say, upon Thy loving heart I lay.

As the abhañgs of the Tukaram in Maharastra, so the dohas of Kabir in Northern India have inspired the devotion of countless Hindus and Sikhs:

O God, I am Thy child: why destroyest Thou not my demerits?...
O God, ever cleanse my mind and body, and Kabir will tranquilly sing
  Thy praises.
O God, such sinners are we that we have never performed service for
  that Lord who gave us our souls and bodies...
O God, compassionate to the poor, merciful, dear to the saints, remover
  of fear, prayeth Kabir, preserve Thine afflicted slave,
O God, and I will perform Thy service.

The influence of Sant Tulsīdās has been, and still is, more widely spread than that of perhaps any other Hindu *bhakta*. Here are a few of the words he uses to praise the Supreme Spirit:

Ek anīh arup anāmā, aj saccidānanda paradhāmā
Vyāpak viśvarūp Bhagavānā...

> He is One, free from passion or desire, beyond form and name, Unborn, pure Spirit and Bliss; His abode is on high; He is omnipresent, manifesting Himself in a thousand forms, the Lord benign...

Not only the *bhaktas* of modern times but even the most traditional and orthodox Hindu writers have often upheld a very spiritual and theistic idea of God in spite of the 'pantheism' of their systems and the 'idolatry' of their devotion. A 13th century Tamil text of Pillai Lokācārya, the Artha-Pañcaka, translated into Sanskrit by Nārāyaṇa Yati, thus comments upon the nature of the arcā or consecrated statue:

> God when present in the inanimate idol, becomes in all respects subject to His devotee. Though omniscient, He seems to be without knowledge; though alive and conscious, He appears inanimate; though independent, He seems entirely to depend upon others; omnipotent, He seems to be powerless; though perfect, He appears needy; the Protector of the universe, helpless; He is the Lord but He hides His lordship; the Invisible makes Himself an object for our senses to perceive, the Inapprehensible brings Himself within our easy reach; He makes himself present and near in holy places, in shrines and temples, in our towns and villages and in our very homes, and in the person of His saintly men...

Another ancient and orthodox writer, Raghunandana, in his treatise on the consecration of idols, explains how these statues are meant only for the utility of the worshippers:

> "For the sake of the devotee do we fancy forms and shapes of that Brahman which is pure spirit, the One without a second, the absolutely simple and incorporeal One."

Many others go even further and say that images of wood or metal and statues of any kind are only for the spiritually uneducated, the '*alpabuddhi*' or '*mūrkha*'; a man with true spiritual insight finds God in his heart, in his soul:

Kāṣṭha-loṣṭeṣu mūrkhānām, yuktasya ātmani Devatā.
In wood or clay God is seen by the foolish ones
In the *Ātman* by those, who are one with Him.

Even the authors of the Purāṇas, before writing their mythological accounts of the deeds of various gods and goddesses, extol the eternal simplicity and absolute Otherness of God:

> I bow in adoration to that great Spirit, the Principle of all principles, the one who has no beginning, no middle and no end, the Unborn, the One who knows no growth and no decay, the Imperishable *(Viṣṇu-Purāṇa).*

In brief, Hindu religious souls, while concentrating their devotion upon concrete symbols and images, though trying to express the

Inexpressible by means of various names, or going to temples and places of pilgrimage in an effort to reach the Unattainable, have often prayed like the author of this Sanskrit sloka.

Rūpam rūpa-vivarjitasya Bhavato dhyānena yat-kalpitam, stutyā
(a)-nirvacanīyatā (a)-khilaguro durīkṛtā yan-mayā;
Vyāpitvam-ca nirākṛtam Bhagavato yat tīrtha-yatrādinā,
kantavyam, Jagadisha, tad vikalatā-dosa-trayam matkṛtam.

Forgive, O Supreme Ruler of the world, three faults which I have committed due to my weakness; meditating upon Thee, O Formless One, I fancied Thee under various shapes and forms; when praising Thee, O Lord of the universe, I have done away with Thine ineffableness; while journeying to sacred places, O Lord, I forgot Thine omnipresence.

The majority of Hindus, whether they defended and practised image-worship with Rāmānuja, Māṇikka Vācākar, Tulsidās, Tukārām and Rāmakrishna, or denounced it with Nāmadev, Kabīr, Nānak, Dādu, Rām Mohan Roy, Dayānand Saraswati and Tagore, have had of God a very elevated and pure conception. The one whom they meditated upon as Brahman, whom they realised within themselves as Paramātman, whom they contemplated and invoked as Bhagavān, may not have revealed Himself to them in the full and spotless light of the Gospel; they have not known the inner mystery of His triune Life; their knowledge of His Nature has often been clouded by myths or misled by inadequate philosophies. Yet their quest was for the One True God, and they would not have sought Him, if they had not already in some way found Him.

B. God as Brahman, the Absolute and Transcendent First Principle

Most Hindus, when speaking of the Supreme Being from a metaphysical point of view, use the term Brahman or Parabrahman.

Brahman is the Absolute beyond all multiplicity, change, division or relation; It is the One Reality which is the Ground and Principle of all beings. Nothing can be predicated of Brahman, because all 'qualifications' or 'attributions' would go counter to the very absoluteness and unicity of the Supreme Reality. Brahman *is,* but it would be limiting Its infinity to say that Brahman is this or that. To know It correctly one must first resort to negation, the "*neti neti*" (not this not that) method advocated by the Upaniṣads.

This is correct because Brahman is *parama,* supreme, transcending all particulars, and *pūrṇa,* the very plenitude of Being.

We know this because we know it as "That from which all these beings are born, by which, once born, they live, into which they enter when they die." *(Taittirīya Up. 3.1.1).* Being the sole Cause of such a complex universe, it must be all-knowing and all-powerful, which indeed it is because "It is Reality-Knowledge infinite." (*ibid.* 2.1.1) Knowledge is not a quality *(guṇa)* of this Reality but identical with it as the term 'infinite' demands. There are no *guṇas* in Brahman, it is *nirguṇa,* the perfect Being to which nothing secondary *(gauṇa)* can belong. It *has* nothing because instead of having, it *is* whatever infinite perfection we are inclined to ascribe to it as a *guṇa.* Thus it transcends our limited words and concepts: "It is That wherefrom words turn back, together with the mind, not having attained it." (*ibid.* 2.4.9). Is it not then an abstraction? No, because it is Real in the most excellent way (*paramārthataḥ Sat).* But it is not concrete! It is not concrete in the manner of a physical person characterised by limited attributes but it is more objective than any such person.

It is, however, difficult to breathe at such metaphysical height. This is why the Upaniṣads and even more the Epics and the Purāṇas often speak of the Brahman in anthropomorphic language, as if it had a human form. Then the Brahman appears to be *saguṇa,* endowed with concrete characteristics. This, says Śaṅkara, is only to help our mind fix itself and meditate upon it, but we must reach beyond that figuration to the true *nirguṇa* Brahman. Rāmānuja, on the contrary, considers the *saguṇa* presentation as ultimate.

Should we apply the term "person" to the *nirguṇa Brahman?* Or should we think of it as "impersonal"? There is a linguistic difficulty here. As a philosophical term, "person" is of Christian coinage and signifies the most noble way of subsisting, namely, as characterized by intelligence and free-will and thus capable of initiating interpersonal relations. In this authentic sense, the *nirguṇa Brahman* is eminently personal. However, due to a weakening of its sense in the 19th century, "person" has often been reduced to "human or human-like individual" and it is in this sense that it has been used by translators to render *saguṇa.* Hence, a great misunderstanding has arisen: Hindus think that the Christian "personal" God is only *saguṇa,* and the non-Hindus think that the *nirguṇa Brahman* is "impersonal", whereas both traditions coincide in asserting the same divine Essence free of composition, "one only without a second" *(ekam-evādvitīya).*

C. God as Paramātman, the Supreme Self

God is not only the Brahman, Ground and creative Cause of the universe, but also the inner Ruler *(antar-yāmin)* and illumining Witness *(Sākṣin)* of each living creature, especially the human one. This is true because he is not a cause exterior to man but one interior and even innermost to each.

The term *ātman* is the Sanskrit reflexive pronoun. It can designate not only the concrete self or any important part of him but also that which, without being a part, is yet interior to him and apart from which he cannot exist, namely, his transcendent but also immanent Cause, the Brahman. Hence, it is quite normal to say in Sanskrit, *Sa ma Ātmā:* "He is my Ātman," (Kauṣitakī Up. iii.8) whereas "He is my Self" sounds strange in English.

The Upaniṣads aim at discovering this supreme Self. *Taittirīya* ii.1-5 ascends to it through the ladder of the "five sheaths" that man is composed of:

> The lowest is the self that consists of food *(anna-rasa-mayaḥ)*... Different from and within that...is the self which consists of life-breath *(ātmā prāṇa-mayaḥ)*... Within that and different from it is the self which consists of mind *(ātmā mano-mayaḥ)*... Different from and within that is the self which consists of understanding *(ātmā vijñāna-mayaḥ)*... Verily, different from and within that is the self consisting of bliss *(ātmā ānanda-mayaḥ)*... Brahman is its foundation *(pratiṣṭhā)*.

Kaṭha Up. iii.10-12 offers a similar ascending ladder of *ātmans:*

> Higher than the senses are their [formal] objects,
> Higher than these the mind,
> Higher than mind is *buddhi,* (organ of judging and deciding),
> Higher than this is 'great ātman' (ego-sense),
> Higher than 'great ātman' is the 'unmanifest' *(prakṛti),*
> Higher than that is the Person or Spirit *(Puruṣa).*
> There is nothing higher than *Puruṣa.*
> He is the limit *(kāṣṭhā),* he is the highest Goal.

Śaṅkara explains that each rung of this ladder is "more subtle, greater and more inner-ātman than the prior one." It is, therefore, clear how the Puruṣa-Brahman which "is the climax of subtleness, greatness and inner-selfhood" is our Foundation and our highermost Self *(Paramātman.)*

But when the question is asked, what is the relation between my individual self *(jīvātman)* and my supreme Self, we find a variety of answers. Śaṅkara calls it *tādātmya* (having that as self), a term currently understood as "identity", but here it is unreciprocal identity because he tells us: "the effect is not the self of the cause but the cause is the self of the effect" (on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.9). Such *tādātmya,* he says, implies the affinity which makes the effect unalien *(ananya)* to its cause, but also dependent on and distinct from it. But many of his later followers view that *tādātmya* as reciprocal identity, thus transforming his non-dualism into a pure monism. Rāmānuja goes so far as to conceive the *jīvātman* as an attribute or quality *(guṇa)* or part or body of Viṣṇu, the Brahman. But Madhva accepts only a relation of complete dependence *(pāratantrya).*

All Vedāntins are convinced of the close affinity which divine Causality has established between creature and Creator. Most of them, including Śaṅkara but not Vallabha, assert also a distinction, but the current presentations of Vedānta often ignore it. A Catholic believer, while holding firm the doctrine of close affinity and ontological dependence, emphasizes distinction because it is the very door for the teaching of our adoption to the unique Sonship of Christ to be truly Good News.

D. God as Īṣvara and Bhagavān, the Lord Benign

Relational terms such as *Paramātman, Īṣvara, Bhagavān* designate Brahman with regard to its creation. It is *of* creatures that the Brahman is Self, Lord and bountiful Lover. Only indirectly do these terms refer to its absolute nature.

Such terms are widely used, but preferences differ. Vedāntins use preferably *Paramātman* and *Īṣvara, Śaivas, Maheśvara, Vaiṣṇavas, Īṣvara* and *Bhagavān.* The *bhaktas* devotion is generally directed towards a "descent" *(avatāra)* of Viṣṇu, especially Kṛṣṇa or Rāmā addressed as Īṣvara or Bhagavān. Some consider such an avatāra as but a partial manifestation of the bountiful God; others consider him as the very *Bhagavān* himself. For a Bengali *bhakta,* for instance, Kṛṣṇa is more than an avatāra, he is the very *Avatārin;* thus he believes that the Supreme Spirit has from all eternity possessed the form of Kṛṣṇa. But, in general, Bhagavān is not synonymous with any one name of the divine manifestations or descents; it clearly designates the Parama Puruṣa or Parama Ātman, the One 'personal' supreme deity. Words like *'deva'* (god) and *devi* (goddess), even words like *Īṣvara* (lord) or *devatā* (deity) can be used in the plural number; Bhagavān is always singular.

The most beautiful and religiously the richest Hindu text to tell us of the devotion to Bhagavān is undoubtedly the Bhagavad-Gītā. We shall study it more in detail later on; here are a few indications about the religious content of this word Bhagavān as found in the Gītā.

Bhagavān is Brahman: the supreme and eternal Ground of all reality. Absolute, transcendent, inconceivable, unmanifest, unique.

Bhagavān is Paramātman: the Self abiding in the heart of every being.

Bhagavān is Īṣvara: the supreme Ruler and Controller of Nature, of the universe.

But Bhagavān is also the good and gracious Lord, the father and friend and lover of the devotee; loving, compassionate, merciful, the 'saviour' of men, their refuge. He is supremely beautiful and charming.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and other *bhakti* texts have developed still further this conception of the Bhagavān. But it transcends any particular sect or school, and the word Bhagavān has come to sum up within itself all that the Hindus feel and believe about God as personal Lord and Saviour, independently of any particular reference to this or that Avatāra.

Conclusion

The Hindu conception of God is perhaps the richest that man has ever attained outside Christianity. The supreme transcendence and perfect simplicity of the Absolute, the purely spiritual nature of the Parama Puruṣa or Parama Ātman, the infinite lovableness and inexhaustible compassion of Bhagavān have been expressed in terms which must deeply move the Christian soul.

Yet two tendencies have again and again obscured or even adulterated this lofty conception: acosmism and anthropomorphism. Acosmism resulted from a hardening of Śaṅkara's teaching of Advaita Vedānta; anthropomorphism from the abundance of metaphors and myths in the sacred literature. The misunderstanding of the notion of *nirguṇa* as implying sheer abstraction and impersonality has given rise to an option for *saguṇa* and a literal accepting of purāṇic myth.

Hindu philosophy has often been at odds with religious devotion. It tends to become an undevotional gnosticism; religious devotion tends to embody itself in image-worship and become overladen with myth. The two tendencies, however, have been counteracted all through the history of Hinduism. Advaita acosmism never turned into a rationalistic pantheism à la Spinoza or à la Hegel, and the myth-laden forms of Vaiṣṇavism never lost sight of the transcendence of God.

But the above tendencies were at work because of the difficulty of thinking out the mystery of the creation of a universe by a God to whom nothing can be added and the salvation of selves who cannot exist except as indwelled by God. Is *mokṣa* simply a recognition of this ontological fact or can it be what Christianity claims, an ennobling initiative of God who raises our race to sharing his only Son's divine Sonship?

Hinduism is not this kind of "Good News". But it has been a wonderful and enduring quest by men who were illumined by the Logos "who enlightens every man" and who stretched both intellect and imagination to apprehend the Unapprehensible.

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Chapter 7

The Gods of Hinduism

(P. Fallon)

Ekam sad vipra bahudhā vadanti (Ṛgveda).
That which is, is One; sages describe it in manifold ways.

Some knowledge of Hindu mythology is necessary for any student of Indian literature, music, sculpture or dance; it is even more necessary for one who wishes to understand the religious aspirations of the Hindu masses and the infinite complexity of their daily worship. *These myths do not constitute a creed;* none of them, strictly speaking, is an object of belief. The goddess who killed the demons, the god who saved the world by drinking the poison, or the one whose heavenly *līlā* (play) enraptures the devotee, are no fairy-tale personages; yet, their reality is not that of a historical fact. Mythology is a search rather than a discovery; poetic invention is at work in the creation of every myth. Myths are not meant objectively to represent reality but they purport to interpret it symbolically. The gods of mythology do not move in our everyday world; neither are they held to be mere illusions. Projections of man's inner longings, personifications of his ideals, symbolic expressions of the mysteries which encompass his existence, these myths possess a reality of their own, *a combination of searching sincerity and inventive make-believe,* religious adoration and artistic creation, faith and fancy. Hindu mythology is richer than any other mythology; on the whole , it is also purer and nobler than most mythologies known to us. Even more than in the philosophical speculations of the Hindu sages do we find expressed in these ancient and manifold myths the deep religiosity of the Hindu soul; every natural phenomenon, every event of man's life, every animate or inanimate being in the universe is felt to be sacred, and the mystery of God's inaccessible greatness pervades all reality.

This mythology is not for us a mere matter of scholarly interest as that of Greece and Rome; it is 'alive' all around us and, though some modern exponents of Hinduism do try to reduce these myths to lifeless allegories, the gods of Hinduism still receive the sincere adoration of millions who flock to their temples, worship their images and listen to the recitation of their 'purāṇic' exploits; most Hindu children are still given the names of these gods and goddesses, and the Hindu calendar is marked by numerous feasts in honour of these deities.

A. The Hindu Pantheon

Every morning many religious Hindus begin their prayer with a salutation to all the divine beings who people the Hindu pantheon. In Vedic times, the gods were often reckoned as thirty-three in number, or eleven for each of the three worlds. But, *henotheism* (i.e., the actual pre-eminence attributed to one god without asserting that he is the only God) was at work and a certain sense of unity mitigated this multiplicity. *Indra,* the god of lightning and thunder, *Agni,* the fire-god presiding over sacrifices, *Varuṇa,* the king of the universe who fashions and upholds heaven and earth, *Sūrya,* the sun-god, or *Prajāpati,* the creator and protector of the world, were severally addressed as the supreme deity in successive hymns of the Vedas. The monistic trend in the Upaniṣads and the later beliefs in many divine theophanies *(avatāras)* further contributed to the reconciliation of multiplicity and unity. All the tribal gods and goddesses of the many races which have made up India's population, many heroes and sages, mythical personages or historical characters have thus been absorbed by Hinduism; all are worshipped, as manifestations of the supreme Being.

Ākāśāt patitam toyam yathā gacchati sāgaram,
Sarva-deva-namaskārah Keśavam pratigacchati.
Just as the water which falls from the sky goes to the sea,
So the salutations offered to the various gods reach Keśava alone.

Even simple children or unsophisticated villagers somehow realise that the many gods and goddesses are but aspects and manifestations of the One Absolute. Each one is free to choose the particular god or goddess, the *iṣṭa devatā,* i.e., the deity which appeals to him most; nay, he is free to leave aside all myths and anthropomorphic conceptions to concentrate upon the formless and nameless Spirit. In practice, while one particular god or goddess: Śiva or Kālī, Rāmā or Kṛṣṇa, or any other deity, is singled out for special worship according to the caste, tribe, family or private likes and dislikes of the individual worshipper, all the other gods are also given some respect and attention; special favours are asked from this or that god or goddess, special practices are observed in honour of various devatās according to the rites to be performed or to the feasts of the calendar. Where religion is deep and sincere, monotheism asserts itself in spite of this baffling multiplicity; where superstition prevails, an *endless fragmentation of the Divine* is the sad result of this mythology.

It is impossible to describe here all the branches of this immense mythological banyan-tree with its roots spread out over the whole extent of the Indian subcontinent. Is it even one tree? Is there an original stem and an organic unity? Hindu mythology, in spite of all the efforts made to reduce to a systematic unity all the myths and cults which have been absorbed into it, appears rather like a forest or a jungle where beautiful trees and flowers grow by the side of poisonous ones. A tremendous surge of spirituality has expressed itself in the creation of a thousand myths, but this efflorescence is often vitiated and stunted on account of man's incapacity to imagine the unimaginable Beauty and Love of God.

B. The Two 'Great Gods' of Hinduism: Śiva and Viṣṇu

1) Śiva: Amarnāth in Kashmir, Kedārnāth in the Himālayas, Viṣvanāth in Banaras, Tārakeśvar near Calcutta, Bhuvaneśvar in Orissa, Somanāth in Kathiawar, Kailāsanāth at Conjivaram, Vṛhadīśvar at Tanjore, Nāṭarāj at Chidambaram, these are but a few of the famous temples which are found all over India, named after the various titles of Śiva. The Sanskrit language has 1008 different names to designate this god. His cult is very ancient. In historical times, his cult flourished especially in Kashmir and in the Tamil Nadu; most Hindus revere him.

Śiva is, in a special manner, the great god of the Himālaya mountains; inaccessible, transcendent, absorbed in sublime contemplation, he is enthroned on Mount Kailās. The Ganges came down from the heavens because Śiva bore on the matted locks of his head the forceful impact of her falling torrents. Śiva can be both terrifying and gracious: he dances either as the Nāṭarāj, in the sheer joy of creation or, as the god of destruction, in the mad frenzy of the *taṇḍava.*

He creates and destroys, he sustains the world, he at times obscures by his power of illusion *(māyā),* or offers grace to, the suffering world. These are the fivefold activities of Śiva, symbolized by the five faces of the god (*Pañcānana*). He sees the past, the present and the future by means of his three eyes *(Trilocana).* To save the earth, he drank the poison and his throat became dark-blue *(Nīlakaṇṭha).* A moon's crescent round or above his central eye *(Chandraśekhara),* clad like an ascetic with a tiger-skin, he holds a trident *(Pināka)* in his hand; he rides the white bull Nandi.[1] Some of his images represent him as a four-armed personage, two of the hands holding a battle-axe *(khaḍga)* and a deer, the two other hands in poses signifying assurance of safety and liberality; in some other representations, he carries a bow, a thunderbolt, an axe, a skull-capped staff, a drum.

The Epics and the Purāṇas are filled with legends and myths about Śiva. Sanskrit literature (for instance, the Kumāra Sambhava of Kalidāsa) has again and again exploited the Śiva theme; classical dance and music are inseparable from Śiva. He is a protean personage: majestic, awe-inspiring, at times ghastly, yet he can also be the homely and familiar deity, husband of Umā, father of Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya, as also of Lakṣhmī and Sarasvatī, the target even of humorous, at times gross and vulgar, pleasantries.

The phallic emblem, the *liṅga,* as symbol of the creative power of Śiva, is the most widely venerated cult-object in Śiva worship. Beads known as rudrākṣa are made into necklaces or rosaries by Śiva's devotees. Small stones of an elliptical shape, picked up from the bed of the river Narmadā, known as *bāṇa-liṅgas,* are considered as very sacred by the Śaivas.

Here are some of the best known names of Śiva:

Śiva (perhaps a Sanskrit adaptation of the Dravidian *śivan* (red); in Sanskrit, Śiva means 'auspicious, propitious, kind').

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[1] The bull, as an image of awe-inspiring strength and creative power, may have been the original idol of the 'great god'. We find similar cults in Crete, all around Palestine, and in other ancient countries. Compare to the idol of Exodus 32, the 'golden calf'.

Rudra (perhaps connected with *rudhira* which means 'blood').

Śambhu (probably from the Dravidian *sembu* for 'copper').

Mahādeva, Maheśvara, Viśvanātha, Bhūtanātha, Bhuvaneśvara, etc.

Indubhūsaṇa, Trilocana, Śrīkaṇṭa, Pīnākī, etc.

Hara, Bhava, Śaṅkara, Bhairava, Aśutoṣa, Paśupati, Nāṭeśvara, etc.

Umāpati, Durgeśa, Girīśa, Gangādhara, Sureśa, Pramathanātha, Bholānātha.

2) Viṣṇu: Many ancient myths and different gods have gradually merged and coalesced into the majestic figure of Viṣṇu. As Śiva is the god of the mountains, so is Viṣṇu the god of the ocean and the god of the luminous sky, a solar and cosmic deity, the protector and sustainer of the world. More peaceful than Śiva, less awe-inspiring and transcendent, essentially propitious, more anthropomorphic even in his non-avatāra aspects, Viṣṇu inspires loving adoration.

Vaiṣṇavism, the Viṣṇu cult followed today all over India, has its roots in the non-Aryan cults of *Vāsudeva,* an ancient hero of the Vṛṇṣi tribe, and of *Nārāyaṇa,* a cosmic god of uncertain origin, represented as lying on the coils of the serpent Śeṣa (or *Ananta*), floating on the primeval waters, the resting place of the worlds; the Aryan Brāhmins identified or amalgamated Vāsudeva and Nārāyaṇa with the Vedic god Viṣṇu, a solar deity.

Viṣṇu's vehicle is the sun-bird Garuḍa. This mystical bird may itself have been a symbol of the sun's flight through the sky but, as in the case of many other Hindu gods, the original animal form of the god was later replaced by a human form, the animal becoming the mere 'vehicle' or mount of the god. Another myth, the three steps *(tri-vikrama)* of Viṣṇu striding over the heavens, points out to the same solar character of the Viṣṇu cult. The *cakra* or disk traditionally associated with the image of Viṣṇu may be also a solar representation.

Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, the four-handed god reclining on Śeṣa (the serpent), while Brahmā seated on a lotus issues from his navel, and attended by Lakṣhmī his consort, is one of the most popular images of the deity conceived as the Supreme God of the universe. A conch-shell *(śaṅkha),* a club *(gadā),* a lotus *(padma),* a bow *(śaṛṅga)* and other emblems are traditionally associated with Viṣṇu.

Viṣṇu is believed to have again and again "come down" into the world of men and animals, assuming diverse forms in order to save the world from various demons. The number of these *avatāras* or 'descents' of the Lord varies, but a list of ten such avatāras has become extremely popular. In the shape of a Fish *(Matsya)*, a Tortoise *(Kūrma)*, a Boar *(Vāraha)*, a Man-Lion *(Nara-siṃha)*, a Dwarf *(Vāmana)*, a Warrior *(Paraśurāma)*, as Rāma, the prince of Ayodhya, as Balarāma, the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa, as Buddha and as Kalkī, the expected liberator, Viṣṇu appears in the world. The Epics and the Purāṇas have developed these myths; the Vaiṣṇava shrines are full of sculptures illustrating them. This avatāra doctrine has enabled Hinduism to integrate and assimilate innumerable cults and legends. Kṛṣṇa is at times listed as the ninth avatāra but, more generally, he is considered as identical with Viṣṇu himself, not only as one of his human manifestations.

Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, identified with Viṣṇu, has become one of the major gods of the Hindu pantheon. When dealing with the Bhagavad Gītā, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Bhakti movements, more will be said about Kṛṣṇa and the myths that have gathered around him. *Rāma,* the hero of the Rāmāyana, has also been identified with Viṣṇu, and his cult is, in many parts of India, the most important and popular form of Hindu devotion.

Viṣṇu represented by small stones called *śālagrāma* (black ammonite, found in the Gandaki river, with spiral marks reminiscent of Viṣṇu's *cakra* or *disk*), is worshipped daily in many Hindu homes; the sālagrāma is for the Vaiṣṇava householder like a living presence of the god. A plant called *Tulasī* (basil shrub) is especially associated with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and kept with veneration in Vaiṣṇava homes; leaves of the Tulasī are offered to the god, its beads are made into necklaces and rosaries.

Lakṣmī, also called *Śrī*, the goddess of prosperity and good fortune, has been associated with Viṣṇu. She appeared out of the depths of the Ocean when it was churned by gods and demons. She is generally seen standing on a lotus, holding a lotus in one of her hands; she is also named Padmā or Kamalā, Ramā or Indirā.

Sarasvatī, the goddess of wisdom (also called *Vāṇī, Vāc)* is, at times, considered as the second consort of Viṣṇu.

Here are some of the best-known names of Viṣṇu:

Viṣṇu (perhaps from the root meaning 'all-encompassing, all-pervading').

Nārāyaṇa (variously interpreted: 'abiding on the waters', 'refuge of men', 'primeval man', etc.); *Puruṣottama* is a name frequently given to Viṣṇu.

Vāsudeva (probably a proper name; also connected with Vāsudeva, a name later given to Kṛṣṇa's father but related to various solar myths, *Vāsu* meaning sometimes the sun itself).

Hari or *Narahari* (Hari may mean 'of golden colour' or 'green'; this name is one of the most common titles of Viṣṇu).

Acyuta, Keśava, Janārdana, Govinda, Nīlāmbara, Madhusūdana, Jagannātha (many names of Viṣṇu are also names of Kṛṣṇa himself).

Śrīkānta, Śrīnātha, Śrīdhara, Śrīnivāsa (and other such names describing the union of Śrī with Viṣṇu).

Lakṣmīkānta (and other names describing the union with Lakṣmī, another name of Śrī); Ramāpati, Kamalākanta, etc. (same meaning).

Padmanābha, Dāmodara, Trivikrama, Vaikunṭhanātha, Gadādhara, Cakradhara, Hṛsīkeśa, Madhava, Upendra, Śeṣaśāyī, Ananta, etc.

C. The Mother Goddess: Śakti

Early Tamil writers call the Mother Goddess Korravai and Aiyai. The South Indian villages worship a number of 'mothers' or *grama-devatās;* all over India, the non-Aryan masses have always worshipped female deities. A slow process of Brahmanic syncretism and integration has brought about a gradual 'aryanisation' of these mother-cults, the female deities being united with various gods as their consorts and manifestations of their power *(Śakti).* The Sāṅkhya philosophy, based on the *Puruṣa-Prakṛti* dualism, was also used to interpret many of these ancient cults, the goddess being identified with Prakṛti, the cosmic energy which manifests itself in the evolution of Nature, and Śiva being identified with the Puruṣa or transcendent and changeless Spirit. The influence of *Tantrism,* an important complex system of ideas and rites distinct from the Vedic tradition, has also played a large role in this gradual assimilation by Hinduism of those non-Aryan myths and cults having the Mother Goddess as their main object.

Many of these goddesses were given Sanskrit names which are mere phonetic adaptations of old Dravidian words: Ambikā, Umā, Manasā, etc.

Durgā, the Tamil Korravai, the goddess of power, the primordial Śakti, represented as ten-armed *(daṣa-bhujā),* mounted on a lion *(siṁha-vahinī),* engaged in a deadly fight against the buffalo-shaped demon Mahiṣa, is also called *Caṇḍi,* and her exploits, as told in the Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, are sung every year at the time of the Durgā festival. The Tamil country is full of Amman shrines and temples dedicated to Durgā ; in Bengal, her festival is the greatest Hindu *pūjā* (iconic worship). The goddess is invoked under nine-forms *(Nava-durgā):* Kumārikā, Gaurī, Kātyāyanī, Bhadrā, etc. Durgā is the Śakti of Śiva, but her devotees consider the goddess as the Supreme and ultimate Reality, identical with Śiva; in fact, Śiva is often practically pushed into the background.

The Purāṇas and Sanskrit literature have extolled Durgā, and Śaṅkara himself is (very dubiously) said to have written beautiful hymns in her honour. She is the auspicious Mother who protects, forgives, saves her devotees, being as compassionate as she is powerful. A thousand popular stories are told about her birth in the mountains (Pārvatī), her youth (Umā), her wooing of Śiva, her two children Kārtikeya (also called Skanda, Murukan, Subrahmaṇya or Kumāra) and Gaṇeśa (also called Vināyaka or Gajānana).

Kālī, the dark and four-armed goddess, wearing garlands of skulls, is another aspect of Mahāśakti in her terrifying and destructive form. Inexorable as Nature who creates and destroys, she is worshipped under many names. The *Daśa-Mahāvidyā* (*vidya* here means 'cult') is an amalgam of mothercults, the Devī being worshipped under ten major forms: Kālī, Tārā, Soḍaśī, Bhuvanesvari, Bhairavī, Chinnamastā, Dhūmāvatī, Vagalā, Mātaṅgī, and Kamalā; many of these 'vidyās' are of frightening, awe-inspiring form. A devout Hindu will tell you that Nature does appear horrible with its cortege of death, sickness, famines and floods but that, behind all this apparent horror, there is the motherly hand of the Devī leading men to liberation.

There are other innumerable forms or aspects of the Devī. The Tantras have multiplied them endlessly. Her names are also very many; many of the names of Śiva are given a feminine ending and applied to the goddess: Śivanī, Bhavānī, etc. Many of the most popular names given to girls are names of the Devī: Gauri, Śyāmā, Māyā, Reṇukā, Mādhavī, Sāradā, Annapūrṇā, Lalitā, Mīṇākṣī, etc.

D. Other Cults

Vedic cults have not completely disappeared. The Sun-god, as a symbol of God's life and light-giving power, is still invoked daily by reciting the *Gāyatrī* mantra; the Sun as *Sūrya* (also called Savitar, Divākara, Bhāskara, etc.) is worshipped. The 'goddess of speech', *Vāgdevī* (Sarasvatī, Vānī, Sāradā, etc.) has a cult of her own. *Brahmā,* though associated with Viṣṇu and Śiva in the Hindu *Trimūrti,* (or Dattātreya), has rarely been given a cult of his own.

Strange cults, arising from a syncretist tendency, have as objects the *Harihara* (Viṣṇu and Śiva considered as one), the *Kālīkṛṣṇa* (the Devī identified with Kṛṣṇa), the *Ardhanarīṣvara* (deity half-man, half-woman, which symbolises the identity of Hara-Śiva and Gaurī-Durgā or their union).

Many cults have been only half-accepted by Brahmanic society especially those which are more common among tribals, low-castes or dalits. Some of them, however, are widely popular: *Śitalā (Mariamman* or *Jyesthā* in Tamil Nad), the goddess of small-pox, whose mount is an ass; *Saṣṭhī,* the goddess of fecundity, whose mount is a cat; *Manasā,* the snake goddess; etc. Demons, semi-divine beings *(Nāgas, Apsarās, Yakṣas,* etc.), apotheosised heroes and holy men, even mythic animals associated with the gods (e.g., *Hanumān),* rivers, trees, mountains, sacred stones, etc., are also worshipped, the Hindus having but rarely distinguished between a saint and a god, the sacred and the divine. Animism, polytheism, pantheism and artistic symbolism have all contributed their share in the creation of the Hindu pantheon.

Conclusion

Do the Hindus therefore believe in many gods? And what is the religious value of their myths?

Let it be clear that, when we ask ourselves these questions, we think primarily of the masses of Hindu worshippers and not only of a few philosophers or of the westernised intelligentsia. Yet, we do not wish either to determine Hindu beliefs by the standard of those grosser superstitions which prevail among some of the spiritually ill-instructed or among a few minor sects. Polytheism and mythology play an important role in the life of many deeply religious people who follow the traditional paths of Hinduism and who are neither profound metaphysicians nor generally addicted to superstition.

It has been said by some that religion and mythology run on parallel lines. Would it be true to affirm that Hindu religion is concerned with the Supreme Being approached as Brahma-Paramātmā-Bhagavān while Hindu mythology is concerned with the many *devas* and *devis* about whom Purāṇas and Epics relate a thousand myths? Or should we say, with some modern exponents of Hinduism, that there is a 'higher' Hinduism, more philosophical and monistic, distinct from a 'lower' one, popular and polytheistic? I do not think that either of those views is correct. In fact, in India more than in ancient Greece or any other country, mythology and religion are very closely interrelated and, at all levels of spirituality, we find polytheism and mythology at work. Tukārām or Rāmakrishna were not 'lower' Hindus than Kabīr or Tagore.

What is then the more common and traditional doctrine regarding this multiplicity of *devatās* and this world of myths? How can a devout Hindu, who believes in the One Brahma-Paramātmā-Bhagavān, worship, separately and successively, so many distinct gods and goddesses whom he invests with the characters and attributes of the Supreme Deity? How can he associate with the One Supreme Being so many mythological personages as wives, consorts, sons or attendants, and offer them divine worship?

Is it perhaps the case that Hindus recognise One Supreme God together with a large number of semi-divine subordinate beings, 'immortals', 'devas' and 'devis' who would occupy a rank and fulfil a function somewhat similar to the rank and function of angels and archangels in the Catholic universe? Each individual ātman being conceived by Hindus as naturally divine, those 'immortals' whose ātman is either liberated or eternally free from the bondage of sin and flesh would be entitled to receive divine worship, insofar as they are thought of as distinct from, and subordinate to, the Supreme Being. I believe that this can explain some aspects of Hindu polytheism; it can account for the deification and worship of many holy men or celestial beings. But it does not go to the root of the problem.

In fact, some 'minor deities', though given some kind of divine worship, do not seem ever to be equalled or identified with the Supreme Being; they always remain subordinate and somehow secondary. Gaṇeśa or Kārtikeya, Hanumān, some particular goddesses invoked in time of sickness, many heroes and many historical or mythical personages, some local gods and tutelary spirits thus receive worship, but they are not invested with the attributes or characters of the Absolute and Supreme Being.

When we turn to the 'major deities', the matter is altogether different. A Hindu will never speak of many 'Bhagavāns'; while he currently speaks of many 'devas'. But many a 'deva' is addressed as 'Bhagavān' or 'Parameśvara'. Śiva is called Mahādeva and worshipped as Parameśvara: Nārāyaṇa or Vasudeva is worshipped as Bhagavān. Similarly, many a goddess *(devī)* is worshipped as Bhagavatī or Parameśvarī, and invested with all the attributes of the Supreme Godhead. Here we are faced with the real problem of Hindu polytheism. Hindu mythology has extolled a plurality of 'devas' and 'devis' to the supreme rank of Godhead. How can this plurality at the very highest level of divinity be reconciled with the traditional acceptance of one Supreme and Absolute Being?

Many will say that these many deities: Śiva and Viṣṇu, Durgā, Kālī, etc. are but diverse 'aspects' or 'rūpas' of the Supreme who is Viśvarūpa (i.e., One with many forms). This explains much, but not everything. In fact, these major deities possess distinct personalities and, in spite of all syncretism, Śiva is not Viṣṇu, Durgā is not Sarasvatī in the eyes of the Hindu worshippers, though each one may be worshipped in turn as the Supreme. What then? Would there be perhaps a similarity between this Hindu belief in the divine Unity-cum-plurality and the Christian Faith in a plurality of Persons in the very Unity of the One Godhead? Is there any resemblance between the Trimurti (Brahmā-Viṣṇu Śiva) and the Blessed Trinity? No, emphatically no; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three distinct 'devatās' respectively identified with the supreme Godhead or a threefold form *(rūpa)* or representation *(mūrti)* of it; the plurality of persons and the infinite richness of the Trinitarian Life unfolded in the mysteries of our Faith have nothing in common with this multiplicity of divine personifications and this mythological richness of feeling and imagination which the Trimūrti and other Hindu representations of the Godhead express. What then?

Hindu mythology and Hindu polytheism belong, I believe, to a plane of reality which is neither our earthly and historical plane of reality nor the plane of the mysterious and absolute reality of God's personal and inner Life. Myths and mysteries belong to different worlds of religious thought. *God reveals Himself* in the *mysteries* of our religion, *man seeks Him* and attempts somehow to represent to himself His infinite greatness through the *myths* of non-Christian traditions. The *'personifications'* of mythology, the many gods and goddesses whom the Hindus worship, are not *'Persons'* in the Christian sense of the term; these deities have a certain personality of their own and become the objects of a worshipping relation, but they remain the creations of man's religious imagination, however 'objectified' they may be.

For a Hindu, generally, *the Absolute is the nirguṇa Brahman,* which does not seem to countenance interpersonal relationships; and all gods and goddesses are but personifications which remain, as it were, on this side of the Absolute. For a Christian, the revelation of the Trinity is an unfolding of the very inner Mystery of the Life and Love of the Absolute, and the Absolute is not to be poetically or mythically personified in various forms; the Absolute is Itself Personal.

Hindus conceive the Absolute as the Supreme Reality, which is like the warp onto which the whole universe is woven. This Brahman is altogether undifferentiated, yet it is the very substratum in which all particular and finite beings inhere, the substance underlying all individual beings and phenomena. There is, therefore, no absolute distinction between finite individuals, nor is there any absolute separation between the finite and the Infinite, the human and the Divine. The most common analogy is that of the waves on the surface of the Ocean: each wave has some shape and characters of its own, no one wave is the Ocean; yet, waves do not exist in themselves, they are not absolutely distinct among themselves, nor from the Ocean itself. Some Hindus have gone farther, some less far, in the affirmation of this non-dualism *(advaita),* but even the bhaktas who, impelled by their religious instinct, try to preserve some distinction between the individual spirits and the Supreme Spirit, still conceive these finite spirits as naturally divine, i.e., as essentially inhering in the Absolute Reality. In brief, the *Christian idea of 'person'* is absent from Hinduism, at least as a category of thought. Even the word *vyakti* used nowadays to translate the term 'person' originally means rather 'appearance', 'manifestation', than, *'a spiritual subsistent complete in itself and distinct from others'*. A Hindu may affirm the existence of many 'selves', but these 'selves' have not the consistency, wholeness and distinctiveness of 'persons'.

This is what explains, I think, the somewhat elusive and fleeting character of the 'devas' and 'devīs' of the Hindu Pantheon. One mythic 'personification' or 'personage' easily merges into another or fades into the Absolute; they are waves on the surface of the absolute ocean, not real persons.

To sum up: Hindu myths have fed the religious devotion of the Hindu masses, they have expressed in many ways the sacredness and supramundane value or symbolism of many a natural phenomenon, and they have helped devotees to rise above mere animism or impersonal pantheism and to establish relations of love and adoration with the Absolute. But, being the creations of man's imagination and longing, they have also reflected his weaknesses and passions. Thus, they have often clouded and obscured the transcendent Majesty of God, humanised the Godhead and brought down the Absolute to the level of man's imperfection. The result has been a fragmentation of God's simplicity and unity. Polytheism brought about idolatory, and man established or tried to establish personal relations of love and worship with mythical or deified personages that stood between him and the Personal God.

Christian Revelation, which is essentially the revelation to us of the Personal Love of God, answers in a divine way the quest of man. The Christian Fact does away with all myths, and Christian Sacramentalism purifies, elevates and fulfils all natural symbolism. The life of the Trinity, communicated to us and unfolded before our eyes in the Person of Christ, in the lives of Mary and the Saints, has made possible for man the most intimate communion with the Absolute, beyond all merely human attempts to grasp the Transcendent.

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Chapter 8

The Religion of the Hindu Village

(G. Deleury)

A. Hinduism: a Two-storey Religion

The temples of India are famous: Ellora, Khajuraho, Konarak and several hundreds of others. Spread over the vast land of the Bhāratas, they seem to cover it with a visible network of holiness which manifests the wealth of a religious tradition as ancient as it appears unified. From the Himalayas to Cape Comorin these many shrines exhibit in diverse styles illustrations of the same myths, of the same legends, of the same symbols. The great temples of India present in astounding achievements of architecture and plastic art the same religious landscape which is described as marvellously in the Mahābhārata, Rāmāyana, Purāṇas and Āgamas.

Yet, however authentic this landscape may be, it is only part of a greater whole. From temple to temple, the pilgrim's road runs across some of the six hundred thousand villages whose Hinduism, also carved in stone, bespeaks manifestly a quite different language. One finds here, no doubt, the traditional *liṅga,* but deprived of its hieratic shape (often it is nothing more than a rocky protuberance) and even of its name: in Mahārāṣṭra, for instance, the linga is unknown, but one sees the *piṇḍi* which, while being the symbol of Śiva, has no phallic connotation and simply represents the rough lump of clay to be shaped by the potter. Of all the classical array of images of gods and goddesses, the village retains hardly more than the buffalo-slaughtering goddess, Mahiṣāsuramardinī, in all her primitive dreadfulness. Two minor deities, the elephant-headed Gaṇpati and the monkey-like athlete Maruti are, at least in Mahārāṣṭra, everywhere present. But more than these images, the objects that everywhere, in the village and in the fields, along the roads and the jungle-paths, on the hills and the passes, remind the villager of the existence of an invisible world are single redpainted stones of which he, within the limits of his village, knows the precise names, but which a foreigner could hardly distinguish from one another.

Hinduism is thus a two-storey religion. The great temples manifest the higher-level Hinduism of the classical tradition which, were it not essentially oral, one might be tempted to call literary, and which, despite its complexity, is relatively well-known today due to the numberless studies and monographs which deal with it. But there exists, side by side with it, a lower-level Hinduism, which is the living Hinduism of the villages, and which it is no less important to study, if we wish to know and understand the Hindu people. The literature concerning it is meagre. No systematic study is available, but only a few monographs on a particular village, or caste, or popular cult. Yet, it is already possible to affirm that these two strands of Hinduism co-exist in a real symbiosis and are linked intimately to each other as the two floors of houses which are connected by numerous stairs and flights of steps. To understand the nature of these connections we must consider them in their natural settings, in the Hindu village.

B. The Hindu Village

It is the Hindu village which, due to the astounding stability of its social structure (caste-system), has borne for centuries the whole weight of the Indian civilisation, allowing it to endure without major loss for over two thousand years. Like all the other villages in the world, it began when man succeeded in producing his own food instead of hunting for it, i.e., with the discovery of agriculture. Leaving aside the question of when and where this happened in India, we wish only to state here that, to all appearances, the specific structure which makes an Indian village properly Hindu is not due to the early cultivators but to later settlers. The Hindu village was born at a time when nomadic people, already highly specialised and strongly organised, decided (or were forced) to live, no longer from the resources provided by roaming herds and flocks of animals, but rather at the expense of settled flocks of men who had themselves discovered the art of farming.

The settlement of those people never obliterated completely their nomadic past and we can notice even today many features of Indian society, even at its most westernised, which recall this past: contrasting with the exuberance and variety of styles of religious buildings, the Indian house appears devoid of any style; the inside of a home or a flat is usually arranged like the inside of a tent where carpets dominate; the most elaborate dishes of the refined Indian art of cooking can be prepared upon a simple fire of wood or cowdung between two stones; the village or the small town often appears to have been laid on the ground like a temporary encampment; the few possessions of an Indian family are, in the etymological sense of the term, movable furniture. In short, the Indian people appear always ready to fold up and go, and it is but natural that they are attracted by long pilgrimages.

The religion of the Hindu village, as of any other, is deeply rooted in the soil of its grazing lands and ploughed fields, and its basic features are common to all agrarian societies. But in this domain, too, the Hindu farmer behind his plough is a reminiscing nomad.

C. The Disquieting World of the Bhūtas

What he recalls first of all is that he had no past. The nomad only passes across the land and his temporary encampments leave no durable remains or monuments by which his grandsons might be reminded of his high deeds. Even his dead he leaves behind. A corpse is a thing impure to be thrown aside for the dogs or the vultures to devour. This at least appears to have been the custom of the Aryan peoples before their great quarrel. But already, somewhere on the Iranian plateau, they had ceased to be pure nomads and had been confronted with the problem of the dead. A few proto-Vedic tribes, which had elaborated a ritual, no doubt already complex, in which fire was used as the normal carrier of the offerings to the gods, had applied the same procedure to dispose of their dead, whom they would burn to make easy their ascent to the gods. Other tribes, the proto-Zoroastrians, had conceived of fire in a nobler way, as the very symbol of the presence of the divine; to sully the sacred fire by the impure contact with a corpse would appear sacrilegious to them and such a practice must have been one of the reasons, and not the least, why they broke away violently from their cousin tribes. They retained, or resumed, the ancient practice of exposing their dead on the hills behind their camps. These Iranians remained faithful to their Asuras and, very probably, forced the proto-Vedic Aryans to migrate towards the Punjab with their cremation-fire and their devilish Devas. As to the emigrating tribes they would soon be confronted again with the same problem of the dead.

However hypothetical, this story deserved to be recounted to emphasise the fact, which itself is not hypothetical, that the semi-nomads which were to found the Hindu village were already in possession of the *Deva/Asura* scheme of oppositions which was going to have many new applications in the context of the village. For the Vedic tribes, the Devas were their own gods, while the Asuras were the gods of others. But in the villages where they came to settle — these others were the human flock of dominated farmers whom they obliged to work for them, the Śūdras who, in true agrarian fashion, were accustomed to bury their dead.

Hence, the two modes of funerals, the devic and the asuric, of the Hindu village. The devic mode is used for the pure, who are cremated; the asuric for the others, who are buried in the ground like seeds. (Similarly, there are two modes of legal marriage, the brahminic and the asuric, but in this case the distinction does not rest on the social origin of the spouses, but concerns the form of their marriage). The pure are the members of the three higher castes whom the sacrament of initiation *(upanayana)* has sanctified. Since the children of those castes remain impure as long as they have not been initiated, they were entitled only to burial. Even today burial is the mode of funeral of infants. The Saṅnyāsis or ascetics, who have renounced their caste by their vows, are also buried. To take an example from Satara District: in 1885, burial was practised by the tribals and outcastes, the shepherds, washermen and the musicians, whereas the brahmins, the traders and the landowners used cremation. The craftsmen used either cremation or burial according to the social rank to which they could pretend; as a result, 70% of the dead were cremated, 26% buried, and 4% either cremated or buried as their status would allow. Owing to the prestige which attaches to cremation as the custom of the higher castes, it has tended gradually to be adopted by all Hindus and to be considered as the true Hindu mode of funerals.

However, the agrarian conception of death is altogether different from the nomadic one. According to it, the dead have not gone away; they continue to exist, to be part of the village, the underground area of which they inhabit, where the future harvests are germinating. For it, a dead farmer remains a farmer, concerned with the success of the harvest and well placed through his burial to contribute his share towards it. Hence, the living farmers will feed him with offerings, so that he may preserve his strength and his concern in their prosperity. This familiarity of the Śūdras with their dead is bound to influence the relations of the Dvijās or Twice-born (through initiation) with their own dead relatives. Hence, the Dvijās' offerings of food to their cremated dead and the numerous *śrāddhas* or funeral rites, which they celebrate in manifest contradiction with the traditional teachings regarding *karma* and *saṁsāra*. The *Sarvapitṛ* or Festival of the Dead is celebrated by the whole village including the Dvijās.

But not all the dead are benevolent. Some of them suffer from frustration: those whom death seized before their allotted time (children, women in childbirth) or violently (murdered men or suicides, victims of epidemics or tigers) or even bad characters unappeased by old age. Those, however, whose death seems to affect their families most are the young girls who die between their betrothal and their marriage, i.e., before they could be integrated into their husband's family to give birth to a son. Such girls *(kumārīs)* are sometimes raised by the bereaved family to the status of a *devī* (cf. E). All such dead form the category of *bhūtas* and are variously named in different regions. The Ratnagiri *Gazetteer* lists no less than 16 kinds of bhūtas.

The villagers think that the bhūtas keep in their after-life the resentment born from their frustration and consider the village as guilty of their death. To deal with these bhūtas, the living have three main resources: To be prevented from roaming about in search of victims, they must be tied to some fixed abode; hence the setting-up of sacred stones (most of the red-painted stones, seen so frequently in all parts of India, belong to this category). To prevent their seeking victims for themselves, they must be given blood; hence, the sacrifice of goats or cocks, and the sprinkling of the stones with their blood; hence, too, the painting of the stones with red lead, clearly a substitute for blood. And thirdly, since these bhūtas belong to the kingdom of the dead, the king or the local chieftain of this kingdom may be asked for protection. This *bhūta-nāth* or lord of the dead is called by many names: in Mahārāṣṭra, Veṭala, or Mhāsobā, or Bahirobā (often assimilated to Śiva, as Bhairava or Vīrabhadra).

Lastly, there is another kind of dead: those who died under particularly portentous circumstances and have thus acquired special powers. These are: the hero *(vīra),* who fell fighting against cattle-thieves; the self-sacrificed widow *(satī),* so faithful that she wanted to share her husband's burning-pyre; the saint *(sādhu),* whose life and teaching continue to inspire his disciples. The hero-stone *(vīr-gal)* is often carved with his image, or with a picture of the battle in which he died. The *satī*-stone is embossed with two breasts surrounded by one arm whose upper arm points to the sky. The sādhu-stone or *samādhi* may be simple or bear the imprint of two feet *(pāduka).* Through these monuments the kingdom of the bhūtas may merge with the realm of the gods: some of the vīras reach the status of Village-Protectors *(kṣetra-pāl),* and it may be noted here that Vīra is one of the names of Hanumān in North India; certain kumārīs become *devīs;* and certain samādhis give a new celebrity to an ancient holy place, as in Alaṇḍi.

D. The Dangerous World of the Jungle

Whereas in the case of the bhūtas, the agrarian mentality took the lead in transforming deeply the nomadic mentality of the dominating group in the village, it is the nomadic thought which governed the villagers' attitude towards the roaming powers of the jungle. The dvijā/śūdra dichotomy which, from the origin of the Hindu village, divided it into two constituent groups (themselves subdivided into numerous castes and subcastes) put each village within a larger frame extending to all the villages around it. Indeed, each one of the castes, besides being an integral part of the hierarchial organisation of the village, is also linked organically with the members of the same caste in the different villages of a whole region. Thus, while the caste system divides each village into comparted groups of families, it also unites each village with many other villages. In other words, the constitution of large territorial ensembles, often but abusively called kingdoms, is not in India a development of an organisation of the feudal type, but a consequence of the very structure of the Hindu village. In India, all kingdoms and empires have been of a transitory and artificial nature and did not, as in Europe, originate lasting territorial units; but such units as did originate were contoured upon the geographic extension of a certain caste or group of castes. Thanks to the caste system, each village is thus organically related with neighbouring villages.

Those villages were often linked with each other only by jungle paths. And when the village is situated at the foot of a hill or in a narrow valley, the world of the jungle mingles with the world of the village. The tribes of hunters or of hunter-settlers roam in the jungle in search of food, while the tribes of cowherds or shepherds appear on the hilly slopes in their seasonal migrations. All these tribes are connected with the villages, where often some of their members have settled to form one of the constituent caste-groups. The tribals have their own places of worship, deities and rituals. Thus, for the villager, the world of the jungle, though not quite alien, is yet a dangerous one. He fears to enter it alone and, if he must cross it by night, he will choose a night of full moon. His agrarian mentality peoples the jungle with roaming bands *(goṇas)* of dangerous spirits, organised like the bhūtas under such jungle-lords as the Lord Tiger (Vāgheśvar, Vāghobā), the Lord Buffalo (Mhāsobā, Mhāskobā), etc. Often these Lords are but the hunter's gods now conceived in agrarian fashion as kings of demons. This change of conception finds its expression in the myth of Śiva or another of the devas fighting against an asura (cf. the myth of Mahābaleśvar). The village protects itself against the incursions of the jungle-lords by setting up a stone which marks the limit between the village fields and the jungle. Cocks are sacrificed on it at those times in the agrarian cycle when such incursions are most to be feared, for instance, when rice seedlings are taken out to be planted afresh into the ricefields.

The jungle-lord or king is a local one, but his function is so universal that the same name often designates all the jungle-lords within one linguistic area. As chief of the demons, he shares their asuric nature, but as protector of the village *(kṣetra-pāl)* he has also some characteristics of a deva. Hence, depending on the locality, he enters into a relationship (of rivalry, of partnership, of subordination, or even of identity) with the Power which represents the preponderance of the dvijās. In Mahārāṣṭra, he is easily recognised by the suffixes *'bā', 'bābā', 'buvā'*, which are added to his name. It would be wrong to translate them as 'father', since they do not connote any relation of paternity but only of sovereignty. In some villages the kṣetrapāl is even called Bāpuji Buvā, a simple doublet which denotes his lordship and which might be rendered as'the Elder one'. Besides the blood offerings that are made to him both to propitiate him as chief of demons and to strengthen him as protector of the village, offerings are also made of horses (made of wood, terra cotta or brick-stones) which he may ride in his rounds. In Tamil Nād, such horses are sometimes real architectural structures. In Mahārāṣṭra, they are offered to the 'King' of the Deccan, Khaṇḍobā; in Gondwana, to Bhimdev. The latter, more primitive, is represented by a sculptured pole, crowned with a head-dress of peacock-feathers (cf. the peacock of Subrahmanya in Tamil Nād). Such peacock-poles are also connected with Khaṇḍobā and Mailar. Lastly, the kṣetrapāl forms a pair (but not a real couple) with the principal Devī of the village.

E. Lady Cholera, Lady Waterpot and the Village Feast

Till recently, scholars, led astray by a kind of ethnology which was too exclusively comparative, were wont to discover everywhere in India mother-goddesses. Doubtless, their cult is an important element of the agrarian culture, but, as we have amply suggested, the Hindu village is not the creation mainly of agrarian people. Although its chief temple is dedicated to a goddess, the latter is hardly ever a mother-goddess in the proper sense of the term. In the primitive setting of the Gond village, for instance, the kṣetrapāl Bhimdev is associated with the goddess Auwāl but she, despite her name, is not a mother-goddess; the latter exists under the name of Bhūmī-Devī, but she has neither temple nor representative symbol and is only invoked in the course of some ceremonies. A similar state of affairs is found in the majority of the Hindu villages. What then are those goddesses who are not mother-goddesses?

Their very names lead into error. The many suffixes which, according to regions, are added to their particular names seem, indeed, to designate them as mothers: *āmuwā, āmman, āuvāl, mālavva, āī, jāī, mātā,* etc. But to understand the true meaning of these suffixes one must rely on usage rather than etymology. They do not express the maternity of a woman so much as her venerability. Thus the exact translation of marī-āī is not Mother Mari but Lady Marī, i.e., Lady Cholera. The devīs of the Hindu village preside over epidemic diseases, provoking them, but also protecting men from them. Each linguistic area has its own series of such Ladies, specialised for each disease, but in small villages one single Lady may be in general charge of the welfare of men and beasts. The Ladies are represented by single stones simply set up on the ground or surrounded by a low wall or sheltered inside small shrines. These stones are painted with red lead, and cocks, he-goats or buffaloes are sacrificed upon them.

The buffalo-sacrifice, which is apparently performed only to propitiate the Ladies in a solemn ceremony attended by the whole village, is practised over a vast area. It seems to have been the 'great' sacrifice of the Śūdras of the Deccan proper, where it is found everywhere, along the Narmadā, in Mahārāṣṭra, in Karnataka and in Andhra. The Marāthas even made it their national festival and their king himself used to slaughter the victim at Dasarā in front of his court and people. In the village, this is a community feast which, as we shall see presently, sanctions the hierarchic order of the castes. Let us only note here how the dvijā/śūdra dichotomy is variously manifested in the performance of this sacrifice: the Twice-Born attend it without sharing in it. Whenever it includes a vegetarian rite besides the blood-offering, a brahmin officiates for the dvijās, but a potter presides over the whole ceremony; the latter, however, does not himself perform the immolation of the animal, which is slaughtered by an outcaste. At this stage, therefore, the dichotomy principle opposes two rival groups of outcastes: the Mahārs and the Mangs in Mahārāṣṭra, the Mālās and the Mādigas in Andhra, the Holeyas and the Mādigas in Karnātaka.

In Tamil Nād, the buffalo-sacrifice is much less frequent and seems to be an importation from the North. Besides, the blood sacrifices are reserved there to the male attendants of the Ladies (of the Yellamma type), the latter being vegetarian. This suggests that the brahminisation of the village society has been in Tamil Nād much deeper than in other regions reputed to be more aryanised.

Images of the village Lady made by local stone-cutters are often patterned upon Mahiṣāsura-mardinī, a well-known form of Durgā which is frequently represented in the great temples. The Durgā myth which it expresses refers directly to the buffalo-sacrifice. But there exists another representation of the Devī, as Gaja-Lakṣmī, also linked with a popular ceremony but related to another category of the divine.

This is the Bhūmī-devī of the Gonds, a goddess without name or figuration, without temple or permanent image, who presides over the sowing, planting and harvesting, and whose nature is to be the agrarian rite itself. The object which represents her and is the focus of numerous rites is the waterpot. Made of ceramic stone, porous clay or hammered brass, this round-shaped collarless jar is the most common of kitchen utensils, the most ancient, too, since it is found in unchanged form in the prehistoric strata of early settlements. A Gaja-Lakṣmī comprises two elements: a Lakṣmī or Indian Venus and this waterpot raised up by elephants pouring water into it. The second element reveals its meaning as an exaltation of the virgin-water which can dissolve every kind of soil and organic matter to give it new forms and make it germinate into new seedlings. Thus it is by way of the virginity of water that the notion of a mother goddess is found here, and the seven 'mothers' *(mātrikās)* of the classical iconography were first, and still are in the popular cults, the seven 'virgins' *(kumārīs).*

The rites in honour of this faceless 'Lady' are quite different from those encountered so far. The latter were centred upon a typically animistic personification which was to be neutralised or propitiated; now we are dealing with a symbolic acting. Its ritual efficacy is no longer due to the mediated power of the 'spirit' sacrificed unto, but directly to the ritual action itself. This symbolic acting, clearly of a mystic type, has for its stage the whole village of which it is the Feast.

Its focus is, as we have seen, the waterpot, filled with water, milk, cooked juice or alcohol, according to the calendar and the region. It may also be empty and brandished upside down on the top of a pole (cf. the May tree), as at the New Year festival in Mahārāṣṭra, a custom unsupported by any popular or Purāṇic story. But in Andhra, the same festival, called Ugadi (Gudi in Mahārāṣṭra), requires the installation of five jars, filled with sweetmeats, and the main rite is the boiling of rice, called Poṅgal in Tamil Nād. A jar filled with milk-rice is also used in the central rite of the Bonam feast in Andhra and in the second Poṅgal feast which corresponds to it in Tamil Nād. Another feast, Gokul Aṣṭami, whose etiological legend is completely integrated with the classical tradition and belongs to the Kṛṣṇa cycle, preserves the popular element of the jar: an earthen jar, filled with a broth of sorgho and curds, hangs from a rope stretched between two houses or trees at a height of several yards; the young men and children of the village, raised on the shoulders of their comrades, must endeavour to break it with a hammer; the glee is full when the broken jar pours its contents upon them (this is a poleless version of the feast of the greased pole). Let us also recall that in the majority of the snake-feasts, which are agrarian rites in which women play the chief role, the ceremonies centre on small jars, filled with virgin-water.

Clearly, the style of these festivals of the whole village is of the agrarian type; yet, the village itself is, as we have seen, of nomadic origin. This difference explains why, on the one hand, the rites remain agrarian in their performance and, on the other hand, the original myths which gave them their meaning are either completely forgotten or replaced by new legends which pertain to the nomadic mentality (type: Gokul Aṣṭami) so that the festivals themselves have acquired a new meaning. They have become the celebration of the caste system, and have often integrated the basic agrarian element within a symbolic ensemble of all the contemporary aspects of the religious world of the Hindu village.

Each one of the castes fulfils in the feast the function proper to it. The feast of Maisamma in Andhra provides a good type of this: the potters *(kummari)* make the new jars and preside as the real priests of this rite; the washermen *(sakali)* whitewash the Lady's temple; the barbers *(maṅgali)* together with the washermen slaughter the cock and the he-goats; the carpenters *(wadla)* prepare the poles the iron-pieces of which are produced by the blacksmiths; the weavers *(sale)* provide the cloth which the tailors *(darzi)* cut into flags: the sap-gatherers *(gaondla)* tap the palm-trees to make the required alcoholic drink; the shepherds *(golla)* bring their sheep and he-goats; the outcasts *(mādiga)* are the musicians; the farmers provide the money; as to the dvijās (Brahmins and traders) they only lend, and somewhat grudgingly, their authenticating presence. In its festivals as well as in its daily life, the village needs the collaboration of all its castes.

It also requires their strict hierarchy. In its yearly returns, the feast sanctions anew the existing social order and reminds everyone of his proper rank. At the Bonam feast in Andhra, the potter offers the jar of rice for the whole village, then the brahmin offers his own and those of the other dvijās, after which the potter offers the jars of the other castes according to their hierarchy. Again it is the potter who presents the feast-day food to the different castes in hierarchic order during the Holi festival. And, on the tenth day *(Dasarā)* of Navarātrī (the Ladies' nine nights), each one offers to his co-villagers the symbolic mimosa leaf *(śami),* with manners which express either the familiarity of an equal, or the respect of a servant or the condescendence of a master, according to the relative position of his caste.

Thus, it is during the festival that the villager experiences the universal and immutable character of the caste system and feels that this system as governing the village is but a particular application of a cosmic law according to which the whole world, vegetable, animal, human and divine, is structured. He knows, not only that certain species of animals are ranked as paria (some dogs) or brahmin (some kites), but that the gods themselves are organised in a caste hierarchy which the ritual of the feast expresses. Similarly, the potter, the Brahmin and the outcaste lead in turn the ritual acting in a symphony which brings together their different traditions. The different rites of each tradition are also combined: in the course of ceremonies of the Pongal or Bonam type, the victims are slaughtered (animistic rite) above a part of the boiled rice offered to the 'Lady', which is then scattered at all the crossways of the village (mysteric rite). The feast may also run for several days in the course of which there is, first, a slaughtering of animals (animistic rite), then, a communing in the eating of Pongal rice (mysteric rite), and lastly, a bull-race (pastoral rite). Brought together by the ritual, the gods are organised into pairs or triads: the spirits become the ministers, attendants or servants of the 'Lady', and she forms with the leading male god a partnership of varying nature (husband/wife, brother/sister, son/mother). This male god will now request our attention before we close our account of the religion of the Hindu village.

F. The Child, Prince and Priest

The transition between the world of Waterpot and the other 'Ladies' and the one ruled by the young Brahmin-Prince, is perhaps most manifest in the Brahmanic legend which re-interprets the national festival of Kerala, Onam. Some popular rites of a mysteric type indicate that we are dealing with an agrarian feast similar to those we studied above. These rites are addressed to Mahābāli, the king of the underworld, whom they are meant to thank for the new harvests. The legend, on the other hand, narrates this very king's destruction by a deceit of Viṣṇu, disguised as a young Brahmin. The good and powerful king of the Onam rites is turned by the legend into an Asura at war with the Devas. This interesting legend expresses as well a structure which enters the religious world of almost every Hindu village. Above the animistic or agrarian deities encountered so far, there stands a male god, generally young, strictly vegetarian, who rules at the side of the 'Lady' as the Lord of the village.

This Lord is the local representative of a celestial authority which has its seat elsewhere and whose realm extends infinitely beyond the limits of the village. He may have acquired his lordship through war: leading a mighty army at the service of the Devas, he fought and defeated the local king of spirits (of animistic type). In memory of this king, he adopts his name, takes up his nature, or reduces him to servitude. The numberless Nāths or Īśvaras (Pandharināth, Mahābaleśvar, etc.) belong to this category. Whether of the Viṣṇu or the Śiva type, they have the same nature and function. The numerous legends show clearly that we are dealing with a lord by right of conquest who in regular Kṣatriya fashion, has thus acquired a right upon the women of the village, in particular upon the 'Lady' with whom he may form a couple.

In the case of Mahābāli, the supplanter was an avatāra of Viṣṇu, but in most cases he belongs to the cycle of Śiva: hence, besides, the Nāths and Īśvaras, the Aiyanārs, Subrahmanyas, Skandas, Khaṇḍobās, etc. A lord of this type is said to be a son of Śiva and defined as warlord. But the nature of this filiation is very particular: it is explained by a Hindu version of the story of Onam. The drop of semen falls into fire or upon the bank of a tank or in another place and produces a son. He is son of Śiva though not of Pārvati (as Gaṇpati is son of Pārvati but not of Śiva) and the legends connect his infancy with the 'river' (type: Gaṅgā) and the 'seven Mothers' (sapta-mātrikā), which accounts in the case of Subrahmanya for his seven heads (śad-mukha). His relationship with the seven 'Ladies', though constant, may vary: they are either his foster-mothers, or his wives, or his sisters. In short, this Lord is Śiva, not however the Śiva of classical mythology, but a Śiva conceived from the standpoint of the village: this is the Śiva of the living Hinduism of the villages.

While his birth is ambiguous and signifies a sociological fact rather than a mythological datum, his aspect as warlord is clear and constant. As lord of the village, he is a chieftain, surrounded by soldiers and armed with a hunter's bow or a kṣatriya's sword; he needs horses for his men and dogs to help him patrol the land. Indeed, just as it is the function of the 'Ladies' to protect men and beasts from epidemics, and of the agrarian rites to secure good harvests, his function is to protect the land, especially the rivers and tanks, from all possible enemies, since he is the *kṣetrapāl* or field-protector. But he is also the keeper of the social order of the castes, a function indicated by his strictly vegetarian habits. He receives no blood-sacrifice and stands for *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) which is one of the constants of Hindu culture. But, on the level of the ritual typology, *ahiṃsā* is a trait of pastoral culture and, in a lesser degree, of hunter's culture. As a religious principle, respect for life develops among people who need to kill for their living and for whom the deity is first of all the lord of life. Thus, the presence at the top of the religious world of the Hindu village of a vegetarian god, set apart from all the others by this very character, is one of the most revealing traces of the supremacy of the nomadic mind in the origin and constitution of this village.

In short, this type of deity sanctions, on the religious level, the specific superiority of the dvijā group by his brahmanic (vegetarian) and kṣatriya (warlord, harem) traits, and, on the social level, the organising and thus complementary function of the castes of the pure in the village community. This reveals a very important difference between the Hindu and the Greek or Latin mythologies: the latter are the expression of a society of families structured by filiation, whereas the first is the expression of a society of castes, founded on co-relationship and subordination, and mainly on the dichotomy between dvijās and śūdra, who yet complement each other.

G. The Giving and Receiving of Dān

In order to update properly this chapter, a complement must be provided concerning what TRAUTMANN (1981) identified as "the central conundrum of Indian social ideology", namely, the fact that ritual gifts, called *dān,* cannot be refused but are accepted with reluctance. This has been solved recently by Gloria Goodwin RAHEJA (1988) through her study of this practice in Pahansu, a village in the North West of Uttar Pradesh.

Castes in this traditional village are linked by diverse sorts of presentations. From the dominant caste, the landholding Gujars, the six *kamīn* castes attached to it in hereditary service (Brahmins, Barbers, Washermen, Sweepers, Carpenters, Ironsmiths) receive at the two harvests shares rated according to their services and to which they have a right (*hak*). Similar shares are given to the other castes (goldsmith, potter, shepherd, water-carrier, oil-presser, leather-worker, bangle-seller) except Baniyas, for ritual services on religious occasions. All these are payments.

But there is another type of presentations, called *dān* in Hindi, which are given by the *jajmān* (offerer of sacrifices) to his Brahmin *purohita* (sacrificial priest) and to a number of other recipients. These are gifts which carry inauspiciousness (*nāsubh, kusubh*) away from the jajmān unto the recipients. These have an obligation *(pharmāyā)* to accept and a capacity to "digest" them.

Kusubh is alleged to be an alien substance or quality which invades a person, family, home or village and which is the source of such evils as failure to produce sons, lack of prosperity, ill-health other than simply bodily, madness and other behavioural irregularities, family discord, poor harvests, premature death and many other kinds of misfortune; not of caste impurity or of merely bodily (*sarīrik*) illness, which is endogenic, being a disturbance of humours curable by Ayurvedic remedies, modified diet or massage. Kusubh is of alien origin and hence is to be removed. This can only be done by particular rituals and *dān*. These transfer it from their sponsor and donor to his brahmin, barber and sweeper regardless of their hierarchical position with respect to him.

Kusubh is "thought to be generated not only at death but in most life processes. Birth, marriage, death, harvest, the building of a house, and very many occasions during the calendrical cycles of the week, the lunar month and the year are thought to generate inauspiciousness" (RAHEJA 1988, p.36).

Villagers are much concerned to diagnose the causes of kusubh. These are generally sought in astrological conditions: all the conjunctions of sun with a new portion of the zodiac, of sun and moon in new moon and in eclipses, of planets in horoscopes. The gods themselves are also sources of kusubh, especially during the four months when they are said to sleep after sending their load of distress on the humankind. But kusubh is also received in all new departures: wearing new clothes, setting on a journey, building and entering a new house, digging a new well, birth, marriage, death.

The precise diagnosis is usually the task of the brahmin and the astrologer. They also determine the kind of rituals and ritual *dāns* by which it can be transferred to the appropriate "vessels" (*pātra*) or recipients.

Dān of various kinds (especially grain, flour, peas, sets of cloth) is to be given by the jajmān (husband and wife) and compulsorily accepted by a variety of recipients at the conclusion of the following rituals: rituals of pregnancy, birth and childhood, marriage, death; harvests, yearly festival cycle. A chief element of these rituals is the *vṛat*. It involves fasting, the telling of a story *(kathā)* about the efficacy of the particular vṛat, and the concluding giving of dān *(udāpan)*.

Dān is different from *prasād*. The latter is the offering returned by the honoured deity as imbued with its auspicious power and to be distributed equally to all. *Dān*, chiefly the special kind of *dān* called *pūjāpā* or *caṛhāpā* must be given to a designated recipient, either a particular kinsman or a person of a particular caste; in some cases it can be deposited at a crossroad to attach itself to a passer-by; it always transfers to the recipient the kusubh of the *jajmān*.

For this kusubh not to produce immediate evil effects in the recipient and his family, it has to be digested (*pacnā*) by him. How? Just as food is digested by heat, kusubh also is digested by heat, that of austerities (*tap, tapasya*). This is why the Brahmin and the other recipients must have renewed their stock of *tap,* he by his daily recitation of mantras in the early hours of each morning, they by other means. These are mainly the simple activities of householders: grinding, husking, churning, marital intercourse (widowed people are not favoured as recipients of *dān*). The *dāns* received are used by the recipients and their relatives or, at times, passed on to other recipients.

This religious *dān* practice, which is of almost daily occurrence, shows that the intercaste relationships are not exclusively hierarchic, as DUMONT and those who followed him upheld, but rather conformed to a centrality model. Their centre is the *jajmān,* usually of the landowning (kṣatriya) caste, such as the Gujār. On the level of the rituals and *dān,* the other castes are equally related to him, whether Brahmins, Sweepers, Barbers, etc. and even Doms and Dakauts. It is never from the Brahmins that the other castes receive *dān*. "For many non-Gujārs, the fact that their pattern of giving and receiving approximates, more or less closely, that of the Gujār *jajmān* is of greater importance than their hierarchical position vis-a-vis other castes in the village." (RAHEJA p. 245). This is less true in Kerala or in the Coromandel plains but it is nevertheless of all India importance. We should, therefore, tone down the emphasis made on the hierarchical verticality in our above sections E. and F.

The centrality of the *yajamāna,* who "sacrifices for himself and his own," is of Vedic ancestry together with the practice of *dāna.* For Manu, the giving of *dāna* is the central value of the fourth age. In his description of the duties of the four *varṇas,* the giving and receiving of *dāna* is crucial in what he calls the "protection of the universe" and in the differentiation of the varṇas. (Manu 1:86-91) In Vedic times, it is chiefly the king or kṣatriya who is the yajamāna of the great sacrifice. By accepting his terminal gift (*dakṣiṇā*) his Brahman takes on himself the evil (*Dapa*) of the king. Both the *Maitrāvani Saṃhita* and the *Kāṭhaka Saṃhita* refer to the giving of *dakṣiṇā* to recipients other than Brahmans. Since those times, Hinduism has remained, especially in the villages, a religious culture deeply characterized by the giving and receiving of *dāna.* As to the situation in the 16th to 18th centuries in the Deccan, H. FUKAZAWA in his last chapter provides confirming materials.

Conclusion

In the course of centuries, Western Christianity borrowed many of its secondary traits from local traditions of pre-Christian cultures: for instance, the date of certain feasts like Christmas, some feast-day customs (Christmas tree, Epiphany cake, Easter eggs, St John's bonfire, carnival, etc.) and appellations (Yule-tide, Lent, Easter, Ember days, etc.). It christianised ancient places of pilgrimage (e.g., Le Puy and the many shrines in honour of St Michael). Had Christianity developed in India instead of implanting itself in the lands of the old Mediterranean civilisations, it seems likely that Christmas would be celebrated on Divali day or Makar Saṃkrānti, Easter would be called Holi, the virgin or St Michael would have replaced the demon-fighter Khandobā, etc.

But human history moves on and the ways of inserting Christianity into an old civilisation can no longer be those of earlier times. First of all, twenty centuries of development have given Christianity a particular cultural face and a carefully elaborated theological heritage, both of which have a meaning in the economy of universal salvation, even for India; it is not possible to strike them off and do as if we could just begin new Apostolic times. Secondly, in India, all those traditional elements of popular culture which the Church could have christianised as in the West have already been re-interpreted and integrated by a great religion, Hinduism. The 'Lord of the hills' has already been turned into a devil, and vanquished by Śiva.

This is why, apart from some minor practices (the *thali,* for instance, instead of the marriage rings), it does not seem likely that the future of Christianity in India can be promoted by an integration of the popular customs of this land. Rather, what is required is an overall effort to situate Hinduism in relation to, and within, the universal economy of salvation. Christianity, which today tries to disengage itself from its strong links with a particular (namely, Western) culture, cannot intend thus to strip itself in order to re-particularise itself by taking on the features of this or any other traditional culture. On the contrary, it tends to become ever more universal in relation to the problems of the world of today and of the united mankind of the future.

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Chapter 9

Hindu Ethics:
1. General Ethics

(R. Antoine)

The study of Hindu Ethics can follow either the historical or the synthetic method. The *historical* method consists in analysing the fundamental positions of Hindu morality in the successive periods and according to the various schools of Hindu thought. The *synthetic* method consists in retaining the fundamental principles common to all schools and indicating briefly their diverse interpretations in the various schools. We choose the second method, because it is more in keeping with the purpose of this book.

Three basic questions must be studied: 1. What is man? 2. What is man's relation to the world? 3. What is man's relation to God?

A. What Is Man?

A Christian considers man as a being in whose unity matter and soul are intimately connected. For a Christian the aim of human life is to reach, after death, perfect beatitude in the vision of God, and through the resurrection of the body, to enjoy that beatitude as a complete and distinct human being. The Hindu view of man is very different. An orthodox Hindu considers the Christian view of man as an illusion. According to the traditional Hindu approach to the problem, human existence is characterised by three different states of consciousness: the waking state, the dreaming state and dreamless sleep. Let us analyse them.

In the *waking* state, I am conscious of my body, of the external objects which I perceive and of the impressions they produce in me. I am spontaneously inclined to believe that I possess a distinct individuality and that the world around me possesses a distinct and objective reality.

When I *dream*, as long as the dream lasts, I am convinced that I move in a real world, that I see, touch and hear real objects distinct from me. But when, on awakening, I remember my dream, I realise that all those 'objects' were mere creations of my mind and that the dream-world I was moving in, is purely subjective and illusory.

The question then arises: if that is true of my dream, could it not be true also of my waking state, and am I not living in a kind of cosmic illusion, from which I shall one day awaken?

What has *dreamless sleep* to teach me about my real nature? In dreamless sleep I have no experience of individual existence and of objective things impressing me. Yet, I go on existing, since, after my sleep, I can say, "I slept soundly." Moreover, dreamless sleep is a painless state where desires, worries, regrets, anxieties have no place. This seems to indicate that, behind and deeper than my usual consciousness as a distinct individual, there lies a changeless principle which is never involved in the vagaries of worldly perceptions, desires and pursuits.

There would, of course, be a possible Christian interpretation of the above analysis. But, the Hindu interpretation, which is to be found already in the *Upaniṣads*, makes of that changeless principle something quite different from our immortal soul. It tends to make of it the Supreme Reality, not only immortal but eternal; or, more acceptably, it holds this to be true of its ground, which could be attained in a fourth, ecstatic stage. In the second chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa persuades Arjuna to fight against his relatives by telling him that what he kills in the battle is of no importance, and that the very distinction between killer and killed is groundless:

> "Your grief is without object; wise men grieve neither for the dead nor for the living. There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor those kings; and there is no future when we shall cease to be. Just as this body-dweller passes through childhood, youth and old age, so, at death, he passes to another body. That which does not exist can never come to existence, and that which exists can never perish. Know that the principle by which this universe is pervaded is indestructible. Bodies can die, but the indwelling principle is eternal, undying and unlimited. To say that he kills or that he is killed is to show one's ignorance, for he neither kills nor is killed. He is not born, he does not die, he knows no past, he knows no future; unborn, eternal, everlasting, unchanging, he is not killed when the body is killed. Just as a man, discarding worn out clothes, puts on new ones, so the indwelling one, discarding worn out bodies, enters into new ones" (*Bhagavadgītā*, II, 11-22).

This passage shows how intimately the doctrine of *rebirth* is connected with the Hindu conception of the eternal *Puruṣa* or Self *(ātman)* of man. What is most true and permanent in man is the One and Absolute Spirit, which seems to wander in a world of forms and names. The ordinary man fails to recognise this, because he allows himself to be bewitched by the multiplicity of appearances.

Morality, therefore, understood as a free striving towards a goal which is not yet achieved, has no meaning when man is considered in his true Self. If the true Self of man is identical with the Absolute, there is no possibility for it to improve and progress, for the Absolute is, by definition, unchangeable plenitude. Morality applies specifically to the ignorant or *empirical* self.

B. Man's Relation to the World

"According to Indian thinkers, man cannot be regarded as standing apart from the universe in any way, much less can he be said to enjoy any place of special privilege in it... They look upon man as just one of the many forms in which the Supreme Being is manifested in this universe."[1] From the point of view of the Absolute, the whole universe is like an immense spectacle which It offers to Itself. The Absolute is the unchangeable Ground of everything and the various modalities: matter, plants, animals, men, and gods, are a kind of magical display which does not affect the serene unity of the Absolute. The idea of a hierarchy of beings, making of man the priest of the universe ("Everything is for you, and you for Christ, and Christ for God") is foreign to Hindu thought. Multiplicity and separate consciousness are only different aspects of the ignorance *(avidyā)* which affects our conception of this universe. That ignorance is not to be compared with original sin, as though it were a kind of original moral fault. It is much more a kind of metaphysical principle for which no one is morally responsible. But while man is under the influence of *avidyā,* he performs actions for which he is responsible and has only himself to blame for their consequences. Any action which tends to intensify the influence of *avidyā* by increasing the consciousness of separateness and multiplicity is morally bad. Every action which helps to dispel *avidyā* is morally good. In other words, whatever man does in the universe out of attachment for his individual self is bad. Whatever he does out of detachment from his individual self is good. The real value of benevolence towards all things *(ahiṃṣa)* , of philanthropy and devotion to the poor lies only in this that they help man to rise above his self-centred tendencies.

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[1] R.N. Dandekar, *The Role of Man in Hinduism,* in *The Basic Beliefs of Hinduism,* p. 115.

The gods themselves are caught in the web of universal ignorance. In olden times they were conceived as cosmic deities, and therefore as part of the world of illusion. They lived on the sacrifices offered by man and selfishly demanded gifts. Such gifts could be offered to them only as long as man remained in the state of *avidyā*; hence the gods wished to keep man in ignorance.

> "He who says, 'I am Brahman,' becomes all, whether he be god, sage or man... But whoever worships a deity thinking, 'He is another, and I am another,' is in ignorance. He is like a beast of the gods. Just as many beasts maintain a man, so every man maintains the gods. It is not pleasant for man to have a beast taken away. But what if many are taken away! Hence it is not pleasant to the gods that men should know the truth" (*Bṛhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣads,* I, IV, 10).

C. Man's Relation to God

From what precedes, it is clear that the question of man's relation with God makes sense only on that level of human existence which is the realm of *avidyā,* i.e., that realm in which man considers himself as distinct from God. It is, of course, the situation of the great majority of men. Indeed, those who *realise* their identity with the Absolute this side of death are extremely rare. And as to those who are only intellectually convinced of that identity, they must still struggle against the ever threatening influence of *avidyā* and egotism. Morality, therefore, although relative and transitory, remains a necessity for most Hindus.

In the *Bhakti* or devotional movements, where God is worshipped personally, man and his relations with God are viewed in another light. Some say that man is identical with the Supreme only in essence and not in form; others say that there is no such identity. Yet, in spite of differences, the various religious systems of Hinduism agree on the following essential points:

(i) The distinction of man's real self *(ātman)* from the aggregate of his body and diverse faculties.

(ii) The eternity of man's *ātman.*

(iii) The divine character of man. This precludes the possibility of his being raised by divine grace to a divine level which he could not claim by nature.

Hence, man's moral striving, whether it be considered as a pure preparation for his true, spiritual realisation or as a real endeavour of religious fidelity, is in all schools related to some basic tenets, among which the most important are the doctrine of *karma* and *rebirth,* the doctrine of renunciation and the doctrine of the four ends of human existence.

D. Karma and Rebirth

At first sight the *Law of Karma* appears as an ineluctable necessity, a kind of impersonal cosmic mechanism, from which there is no escape. The present existence is shaped and determined by the deeds *(karma)* of a previous existence, which itself was the result of the deeds of a prior existence, and so on in a beginningless series of lives submitted to the blind determinism of strict retribution. That series of successive lives is called *saṃsāra* (stream-current) and is compared to a vast ocean *(bhavajaladhi)* fraught with dangers and whirlpools. It is within this *saṃsāra* that morality is to be exercised. Hinduism recognises the possibility of *mokṣa* (liberation from *saṃsāra*) and sets it as the highest goal of human existence. That means that, in spite of the rigorous causality of the *Law of Karma,* man can be induced to break the bondage in which he is held, either by realising the truth of the Sacred Books or by the special choice of the personal God.

We can follow the main trend of Hindu ethics by quoting extracts from the *Katha-Upaniṣad* which has been interpreted both by the school of *pure advaita* and by the *Bhakti school.*

(i) Man is caught in the bondage of *saṃsāra:* "Like corn, man gets ripe, like corn, he is born again" (I, 1, 6).

(ii) The wise man discerns spiritual values: "Different is what is good *(śreyas),* different is what is pleasurable *(preyas).* The sage chooses the good; the dull-witted chooses the pleasurable. Those who think that this world exists and the other world does not exist fall again and again under the sway of death" (I, 2, 1-6); cf. our Ch. 4.

(iii) The great question: "Explain to me that Being which transcends both virtue and vice, action and inaction, past and future" (i.e., which is permanent) (I, 2, 14).

(iv) The Self *(Ātman)* is that permanent Reality: "Unborn, undying, eternal, seated in the cavity (i.e., in the deepest recess of man's spirit), spiritual, all-pervading" (I, 2, 18-22).

(v) The condition on which the goal is reached:

Negatively: "Who fails to give up evil deeds, lives without control and concentration, and whose mind is not pacified cannot obtain the Self, even through knowledge" (I, 2, 24).

Positively: The verse 1, 2, 23 is translated in two different ways:

The pure advaitin says: "That Self cannot be obtained either by verbal explanation, or by reflection, or by much revealed lore. *Only he who desires Him can obtain Him: the Self reveals his own truth."*

The devotee *(bhakta)* says: "That Supreme Self cannot be obtained either by verbal explanation, or by reflection, or by much revealed lore. *He alone whom He chooses can obtain Him. The Self reveals Himself to Him."*

E. Nivṛtti and Pravṛtti

Two different tendencies manifested themselves in the quest for release from the bondage of *saṃsāra.* Since activity is always prompted by desire, and since desire means further attachment, the radical solution lies in complete withdrawal from activity *(nivṛtti)* and concentration on the Self. This is the path followed by the hermits, the *saṅnyāsins.* The other solution advocates the practice of sacrifices, almsgiving and penance, seeing in them means of purification. To engage oneself in such works is *pravṛtti* (active life).

Can both *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti* be reconciled? The *Bhagavadgītā* has given the best answer to this question. Pure inactivity may be the ideal of a few hermits; but the great majority have to act, whether they like it or not: "No one can remain inactive even for one moment" (III, 5). The Lord Himself is active: "The Lord *(Īṣvara)* is present in the heart of all beings; by his wonderful power *(māyā)*, He sets them spinning around as parts of a machine" (XVIII, 62). Moreover, inactivity may lead to self-delusion: "He who sits down holding his organs of action in restraint, but remembers the sense-objects, is a hypocrite who deludes himself" (III, 6). Hence, if act we must, let us act without attachment to the result of our actions. *Tyāga* or detachment should be the hall-mark of wise activity: "Renouncing actions motivated by desire, that is real *saṁnyāsa* (renunciation); renouncing the fruit of every action, that is real *tyāga*" (XVIII, 2). In other words, let actions be done, because each one's duty *(svadharma)* ordains him to act, but let all actions be disinterested *(niṣkāma)*: "Always do your work, because it is to be done, and without attachment; the man who acts without attachment attains the highest" (III, 19). Even in performing purely ritual duties, the same detachment is necessary: "Souls full of desire, intent on gaining some heaven, enter the path of pleasure and power which yields nothing but the fruits of actions, in another birth" (II, 43). Yet, that moral ideal of detachment in action is not the last word of the *Gītā*.

That moral ideal is somewhat abstract, and perhaps more difficult to follow than the upaniṣadic ideal of complete renunciation of activity itself. The originality of the *Gītā* rather lies in this that it integrates the *Karma-yoga* into the *Bhakti-yoga*. Let all self-centred desires be renounced, but let man find the inspiration of disinterested action in his total devotion to the Lord. Universal detachment is turned into total attachment to Kṛṣṇa: "Take refuge in Him exclusively; by His grace you will obtain supreme peace and permanent abode... Because you are my chosen *(iṣṭa)* friend, I shall speak for your own good. Give me your heart, your devotion, your adoration, your homage; and you shall find me; this is my true promise to you whom I love" (XVIII, 62-65).

F. The Puruṣārthas

Human life cannot reach the high plane of *niṣkāma karma* without struggle. The deep impression left by previous lives, the tendencies of the empirical self are too strong to be controlled by a single act of the will. Hinduism distinguishes three types of men according to the predominant influence of one of the qualities *(guṇas)* of matter. When *tamas* (darkness) predominates, man takes good for evil and evil for good. His activity is dull, stubborn and malicious. When *rajas* (energy) predominates, man cannot discern clearly between good and evil and his activity is purposeful, self-centred and passionate. When *sattva* (truth and light) predominates, man clearly sees what is right and what is wrong, and his activity is selfless, persevering and unaffected by success or failure.

In an almost parallel manner, Hinduism speaks of different aims of human life *(puruṣārtha).* If man seeks only the satisfaction of his instincts and sensuous desires, his aim in life is *kāma* (pleasure). If he strives towards power and property, his aim in life is *artha* (wealth). But he may rather pursue the ideal of a morally sound existence, then his aim in life is *dharma* (duty). Finally, rising above the bondage of matter and its three *guṇas,* he may fix his eyes on the supreme liberation from all bondage and rebirth, then his aim in life is *mokṣa* (liberation). According to most of the ancient teachers, those four ends exclude one another. But the modern tendency is to conceive that a proper integration of those four pursuits under the supremacy of the highest, i.e., *mokṣa,* establishes harmony in human life.

Conclusion

This sketchy survey of what is best in general Hindu ethics shows that Hinduism possesses sound ethical principles which are not very different from the moral sense inspired by natural law, or even, in the Gītā, from the Christian teaching concerning selfless activity. Yet, there always remains an ambiguity due to the cleavage between the spontaneous moral sense found in Hindu doctrine and the metaphysics which claims to support it.

That ambiguity is more keenly felt in the context of pure *advaita* (non-dualism). In that context we have to remember that what we affirm of man on the plane of ignorance is to be denied on the plane of perfect knowledge. On the plane of ignorance man appears as an individual who feels his limitations and tries to overcome them by self-control and renunication. The very sincerity of his effort depends on that ignorance due to which man remains unaware of his 'true' reality. Seen from the point of view of the Absolute, moral effort appears as a non-real pursuit of a non-real end, because the true Self of man does not pursue anything. The subject of moral striving is an illusory self, who will finally disappear, when his striving comes to a successful end. Freedom, struggle, responsibility lose their vital value, once they are reduced to mere constructions of ignorance.

In the context of *Bhakti,* morality seems to acquire more substance. Yet, even here, the ambiguity is not totally dispelled. Let me quote once again *Gītā,* XVIII, 61-62: "the Lord is present in the heart of all beings; by his wonderful power *(māyā),* he sets them spinning around as parts of a machine. Take refuge in Him exclusively; by His grace you will obtain supreme peace and permanent abode" (61-62). If in those verses the term *māyā* means 'magical' rather than 'wonderful' power, then how am I to be sure that my supreme act of surrender is not the final trick of the divine magician? For all I know, that supreme act instead of giving full meaning to my life may be as meaningless as all my other actions.

The doctrine of the *ātman,* although different from the traditional scholastic teaching on the soul, has a definite affinity with the experience which some mystics have tried to express in words. They speak of the "spark of the soul" or, as St. Bernard, of the indelible "image of God" as the ultimate ground of our existence. At that level, we transcend the psychological or empirical ego with which most of our spiritual striving is concerned. Thus there is something true about the illusory character of a spiritual life solely concerned with the fluctuations of an ego which is not meant to survive. Thomas Merton puts it as follows:

"There is an irreducible opposition between the deep, transcendent self that awakens only in contemplation, and the superficial, external self which we commonly identify with the first person singular. We must remember that this superficial 'I' is not our real self. It is our 'individuality' and our 'empirical self' but it is not truly the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God. This 'I' that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true 'I' that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise of that mysterious and unknown 'self' whom most of us never discover until we are dead. Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Far from it. This self is doomed to disappear as completely as smoke from a chimney. It is utterly frail and evanescent. Contemplation is precisely the awareness that this 'I' is really 'not I' and the awakening of the unknown 'I' that is beyond observation and reflection and is incapable of commenting upon itself. It cannot even say 'I' with the assurance and impertinence of the other one, for its very nature is to be hidden, unnamed, unidentified in the society where men talk about themselves and about one another." (*New Seeds of Contemplation,* London, Burns & Oates, 1962, pp. 5-6).

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Chapter 10

Hindu Ethics: 2. Special Ethics (Caste, Āṣramas, Etc.)

(R. Antoine)

Hindu morality is not a matter of principles alone; it is primarily a matter of practical conduct, largely determined by the social environment. Although the Law of Karma makes of human life a very individual affair, the *Dharma Sūtras* (Codes of Laws) are emphatic about the social duties of every Hindu. Those *Dharma Sūtras* and all the literature deriving from them *(Dharmaśāstra literature)* are not concerned with theories on Ethics, but with the practical code of behaviour. As such, they have played an important role in the shaping of Hindu life and society.

A. Dharma

Although the word *dharma* has come to mean 'religion' in modern Indian languages, its classical meaning is 'righteousness' or good ethical practice according to the prescriptions handed down from age to age by the virtuous ancestors. Thus understood, *dharma* designates the traditionally *established order,* which includes all duties, whether individual, social or religious. It puts men on their guard against the three great moral pitfalls: *kāma* (lust), *lobha* (covetousness) and *krodha* (anger). These can be compared with what St. John says of the world (1 Jn 2:16): "What does the world offer? Only gratification of corrupt nature, gratification of the eye, the empty pomp of living." *Dharma* also enjoins fundamental virtues: "I will explain the eight good qualities of the soul. They are, compassion for all creatures, patience, freedom from discontent, purity, earnest endeavour, auspicious thought, freedom from avarice, freedom from envy" *(Gautama Dharma Sūtra). Bhagavadgītā* XVI, 1-3 thus describes the virtuous: "These are the qualities of one who is born to gain divine estate: fearlessness, rectitude, purity, perseverance in the path of knowledge and discipline, charity *(dāna),* self-control *(dama),* sacrifice, study of sacred precepts, straight-forwardness, doing no harm *(ahiṃsā),* truthfulness, equanimity, detachment *(tyāga),* peace and no malice, compassion for all, sobriety, gentleness, modesty, guilelessness, fervour, forgiveness *(kṣamā),* steadiness, cleanness, freedom from hatred and pride."

Besides such general prescriptions contained in *Dharma,* every man, according to his status, has his particular *dharma (svadharma),* which is determined by the place he occupies in society. The decisive factor of a Hindu's *svadharma* is the *caste.*

B. Caste

Caste is a very complex reality which it is difficult to define. The best we can do is to try to enumerate the distinctive characters which may be said to apply to all castes:

(i) A caste is a closed social group theoretically based on heredity: everyone belongs to the caste in which he is born.

(ii) It possesses an independent organisation, a head and a council, which may meet on special occasions.

(iii) It has common festivals and common usages particularly in matters of marriage and food.

(iv) Its members usually practise the same profession or trade, or at least related professions.

(v) It has the power to impose penalties on its members, the most grievous being expulsion from the caste.

"From the point of view of the individual member of a caste the system provides him from birth with a fixed social milieu from which neither wealth nor poverty, success nor disaster can remove him, unless of course he so violate the standards of behaviour laid down by his caste that it spews him forth — temporarily or permanently. He is provided in this way with a permanent body of associations which controls almost all his behaviour and contacts. His caste canalises his choice in marriage, acts as his trade union, his friendly or benefit society, his slate club and his orphanage; it takes the place for him of health insurance, and if need be, provides for his funeral. It frequently determines his occupation, often positively, for in many castes the occupational tradition is very strong indeed, commonly negatively, since there are many pursuits, at any rate, in the case of all but the lowest castes, which he cannot follow, or can follow only at the cost of ex-communication from the society to which he belongs."[1]

The Origin of Caste. The traditional account of the origin of caste goes back to *Ṛgveda,* X, 90: "One fourth of the Supreme Being constitutes all beings, while three fourths of Him are immortal and stand above. With the one fourth below, He extended on all sides into the animate and the inanimate... His face became the Brāhman. His arms were made into the Kṣatriya. His thighs became the Vaiśya. From His feet the Śūdra was born." This hymn X. 90 was endeavouring to explain how the whole universe originated from a *single* Cause, namely, a gigantic Male *(puruṣa)* through whose sacrificial dismembering every part of our world came to be. Thus it mentioned the different kinds of beasts, of celestial bodies, the four Vedas and, naturally, the four classes of men, not however to stress their distinction but rather their common origin from the One Cause.

While doing that, it gives us some information concerning the social organisation created by the Aryans after they had settled on Indian soil. It was a society ruled by kings*(Kṣatriya),* who were assisted by priestly ministers and interpreters of the traditional code of behaviour *(Brāhmans),* while cultivation and trade were in the hands of a third class *(Vaiśyas).* These three upper classes were the ruling classes of invaders, who reduced the original settlers *(Śūdras)* to the state of serfdom.

The Sanskrit word for those four classes is *varṇa* (colour) and seems to indicate that the racial element in the distinction between the four classes played an important part.

The *Brāhman* (white colour) was assigned the following duties: studying, teaching, sacrificing, assisting others to sacrifice, giving alms and receiving gifts.

The *Kṣatriya* (red colour) was assigned the following duties: studying, sacrificing, giving alms, using weapons, protecting treasure and life.

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[1] J. Hutton, *Caste in India,* p. 97.

The *Vaiśya* (yellow colour) was assigned the following duties: studying, sacrificing, giving alms, cultivating, trading and tending cattle.

The *Śūdra* (black colour) was given the duty of serving the three other *varṇas*.

The first three *varṇas* were the *dvijās* (twice-born); their members alone were entitled to the rite of initiation *(upanayana)* and to the wearing of the sacred thread.

In the course of time, forbidden inter-marriage would have taken place and given rise to the creation of new classes which eventually became the numerous castes (more than 2500) of medieval India.

(Let us note, however, that, at least in the Gangetic plain, "in the time of the Buddha, endogamy and commensality, the two fundamental characteristics of modern caste, are still absent," according to Wagle, p. 133.)

This traditional account of the origin of caste is too simple. It must have been an attempt at giving the sanction of ancient tradition to a state of affairs the origin of which had been obscured and forgotten. Several scholars are inclined to think that caste is not an exclusively Aryan importation and that, before the Aryan invasion, religious and magical *taboos* together with occupational monopolies already provided a strong basis for the future institution of the caste-system. The Aryans, anxious to establish their supremacy would have exploited the existing social divisions and, owing to the ascendancy of the priestly class, solidified a social structure which was already existing in a fluid state. It is not impossible that the priestly class itself was not purely Aryan, for, when the Aryans assimilated important elements of the aboriginal religion, they needed aboriginal priests to perform the corresponding rites correctly. When, later on, the Law of Karma began to be accepted as a dogma, it provided a new support to the caste-system, for every man became convinced that his birth in a particular caste was the result of his previous existence, and that the strict observance of the rules of his caste was the best way to assure his liberation. This, in fact, is close to the argument used by Kṛṣṇa to persuade Arjuna that he, as a Kṣatriya, must fight. After asserting the eternity of the true Self, Kṛṣṇa tackles the question from the more practical angle of duty:

> "Look at it from the point of view of your caste duty *(svadharma)*. Why hesitate? For a Kṣatriya, is there any thing nobler than a religious war? Happy

are the Kṣatriyas to whom such a battle as this comes: it opens a door to heaven. Were you to refuse to fight, you would spurn your duty and incur disgrace and sin. All beings will speak ill of you in the future. For a man of honour, that kind of disgrace is worse than death" (*Bhagavadgītā*, II, 31-34).

Outside the pale of the four *varṇas* are the untouchables, whom Gandhi called *Harijans* (the people of god Hari) but who often prefer nowadays to call themselves *Dalits* (oppressed). They too have divided themselves into a great number of 'subcastes'.

C. The Four Āśramas (Life-Stages)

The life of the members of the three superior classes, Brāhmans, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas, is theoretically divided into four stages. This is how the *Manusmṛti,* one of the most famous law-books, prescribes them:

(i) "Let the young man study the Vedas in due order, without breaking celibacy." This is the state of the bachelor *(Brahmacārī).*

(ii) "After studying the Vedas, let him dwell in the householder *(Gṛhastha)* order."

(iii) "When the householder see wrinkles (on his face) and whiteness (in his hair) and the son of his son, let him retire to the forest" *(Vānaprastha).*

(iv) "After passing the third portion of his life in the forest and become free of all attachment, let him wander (as an ascetic) during the fourth portion" *(Sannyāsī).*

The Brahmacārī. At a particular age fixed for each of the three superior classes, the Hindu boy is received into the community of the twice-born by the ceremony of initiation. His life as a student begins. Under his *guru* (preceptor), in whose house he lives, he studies the sacred books and is at the service of the guru. Continence, frugality and discipline will make of the boy a sturdy and energetic youth. Here is an extract from the programme to be followed:

"The *Brahmacārī* should abstain from wine, meat, perfumes, garlands sweetmeats and women; he should not take acid food nor do harm to any living being. No ointments, no collyrium, no shoes, no umbrella. He must avoid lust, anger and greed. Dancing, singing and playing musical instruments are not allowed. Gambling, gossip, slander and untruth are to be shunned. He should neither look at, nor touch women. He should never strike anybody. Let him sleep alone in continence" (*Manusmṛti,* II, 177-180).

The Gṛhastha. At the end of his student life, the *brahmacārī* offers a gift to his *guru* and returns home. He marries and begins his life as a householder. The social importance of the family is strongly stressed. Among the four stages of life, that of the householder is central: "As all streams and rivers flow to rest in the ocean, so all the *āśramas* flow and find their support in the householder" (*Manusmṛti*, III, 90). Hospitality, almsgiving, industry, truthfulness and fidelity to the ritual and social duties of the caste are the qualities of the *gṛhastha*. Women, at home, "must be honoured and adorned by fathers, brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law." Thus Hindu society finds its stability in the respect of caste-distinctions and in the householder's fidelity to the multifarious duties of his caste.

The Vānaprastha. When parents grow old, when they are surrounded by grand-children, their normal duty is to retire from the world. Husband and wife together, or husband alone, leave the house and go to the forest where they spend their days in prayer, austerity and the performance of sacrifices.

The Saṁnyāsī. Finally, the time comes when man renounces everything even the performance of sacrifices. He lives as a wandering mendicant, without shelter, without fire, in a state of complete indifference.

> "Wishing neither for death nor for life, the *saṁnyāsī* should wait for the appointed time as a labourer for his wages. His feet guided by his eyes, the water he drinks strained through a cloth, his speech purified by truth, his conduct governed by reason. Let him endure insult without retaliation, let him make no enemy, knowing that his body is of no value. Let him never answer anger with anger but rather bless those who curse him. Truthful in speech, he should find his delight in the Supreme and be indifferent to all pleasure. Having no friend but the Self, let him wander here upon earth in quest of true happiness" (*Manusmṛti*, VI, 45-49).

There is no provision, in this scheme of life, for the special training of women. Women are supposed to acquire the qualities of their vocation as wives and mothers in the household where they are born.

The traditional *āśramas* are a thing of the past. There is no scope, in the changed circumstances of modern life, for a strict observance of the rules laid down in the old law-books. Moreover, much of the spirit which animated the law-givers has gradually been replaced by a mentality which has not much affinity with spiritual pursuits. The modern moral outlook of India must be taken into account, if we want to get a clear and realistic picture of present-day Indian society.

D. Morality in Modern India

The traditional outlook, based on the Law of Karma, Caste and the four Āśramas, has something about it which makes of human life a passive acceptance of fate rather than a dynamic effort. It would, however, be a mistake to think that India had to wait till she came into contact with the West to realise the unsatisfactory character of a purely fatalistic attitude to life. Ancient popular literature, unconcerned with philosophical discussions, had a much saner view of life. The well-known verses of the *Hitopadeśa* (Educational Instruction) very aptly illustrate the sanity of popular wisdom: "Just as a chariot cannot move on one single wheel, so also, without human effort, destiny cannot be fulfilled. It is through effort, and not through desire alone that destiny is fulfilled. Deer do not enter the mouth of a sleeping lion *(na hi suptasya siṃhasya praviśanti mukhe mṛgāh)."*

What the contact with the West brought to India is the practical inspiration and example of a society in which the individual's initiative can shape society, as well as refuse to be totally shaped by it. The consequent change of the Indian mentality was due to the initiative of a few individuals who lived and worked in an atmosphere of reaction. Their main concern was to fight against specific social evils sanctioned by ancient tradition, such as the burning of widows, enforced perpetual widowhood, untouchability. But, in order to succeed, they had to find a moral and religious basis for their reforms. The unification of India under British rule, and the ideals of nationalism and social equality imported from the West, lent their dynamic support to the new ideas.

Those among the social reformers who wanted to remain faithful to Hinduism were faced with the difficult task of 'purifying' Hinduism from all those 'adventitious' elements which had led it to sanction social evils. Men like S. Radhakrishnan insisted on the purely spiritual values of Hinduism. Caste and Karma were gradually given less importance, and religion was transformed into a kind of collective struggle for the welfare of all.

But there were and are many for whom morality and social justice did not require any connection with the Hindu religion. Those social and political workers did not hesitate to denounce a religion which, in their opinion, had caused so much misery and stagnation.

The democratic ideal of equality was bound to clash with the caste-system, which is based on a principle of inborn inequality. In a more pragmatic manner, the political strife between parties prompts political leaders to coax the lower castes and untouchables in order to win their votes. Deeper even than political expediency, there was the desire of saving Hinduism itself from ruin. If the untouchables and depressed classes, becoming more conscious of their social importance, decided to leave Hinduism for Christianity or Buddhism, where they would no longer suffer from the disabilities of caste distinctions, it was imperative for Hinduism to broaden its conceptions and give a place in its fold to those despised classes. Unfortunately that religious effort towards greater equality failed to neutralise the reaction of casteism. This is clear from the fact that, in spite of their official and ritualistic integration into Hinduism, the depressed classes have not yet gained religious and social equality with caste-Hindus. The mass conversion to Buddhism led by Dr. Ambedkar in the fifties was specifically intended as a condemnation of the incapacity of Hinduism to break its traditional frame-work of social discrimination. The reason for that failure is that the so-called reform was inspired by the motive of self-preservation rather than by the deep conviction of human equality.

That is why social leaders who have at heart the establishment of a truly democratic society prefer to solve the problem of caste without reference to religious motives or ambitions. If men are truly equal, no other consideration than their equality should guide the task of reform. This attitude is far from being accepted by all. In theory, it is easy to state that the social problem and the religious problem are different. But, in fact, caste cannot be taken as a purely social phenomenon. It is woven into the very texture of Hinduism. In many cases, the down-trodden whom the social reformer wants to liberate are the very persons who offer resistance, because of their traditional attachment to the religious practices and the social and economic safeguards guaranteed by their castes.

If the occupational exclusiveness of caste tends to disappear to be replaced by class-divisions, the restrictions regarding diet and inter-dining are still observed by most, and the restrictions about inter-marrying are but rarely ignored.

E. Hinduism Re-interpreted

Fundamental values such as the dignity and freedom of the human person, the equality of all men and the personal destiny of each member of mankind, are human values which found their full expression in Christianity. Hinduism wants to integrate them. The task of integration demands an effort of re-interpretation which, at times, considerably distorts the meaning of traditional Hinduism. Here is the general outline of S. Radhakrishnan's re-interpretation.

(1) In order to avoid the difficulty of reconciling the above mentioned values with some of the fundamental metaphysical positions of Hinduism, Radhakrishnan reduces Hinduism to a 'way of life'. "Hinduism insists not on religious conformity but on a spiritual and ethical outlook in life. Whatever our theological beliefs and metaphysical opinions may be, we are all agreed that we should be kind and honest, grateful to our benefactors and sympathetic to the unfortunate."

(2) On the basis of the 'good life', he undertakes to analyse the main tenets of Hinduism. But it proves very difficult to remain faithful to his original purpose. When he has to explain what things *are*, what the relations are between man and God, he cannot do so without a minimum of 'theological belief and metaphysical opinion'. What is very striking is the Christian ring of many of the formulae he uses to explain what Hinduism really is. *Dharma,* he says, is the *truth* of things. In man, it manifests itself by common cravings: "Each individual has in him the sex and the parental instincts, love of power and wealth, desire for the common good and a hunger for communion with the unseen." Hence, the four supreme ends of life: *kāma, artha, dharma* and *mokṣa.* But Hinduism teaches that these ends must be viewed in the 'perspective of the eternal'. "The Hindu Dharma says, Man does not live by bread alone [did you never read that in the Gospel?]; he lives or must live by his life of spirit."

In his explanation of the four stages of life, Radhakrishnan justifies the withdrawal from social and worldly pursuits *(vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa)* as follows: "The stature of man is not to be reduced to the requirements of society. Man is much more than the custodian of its culture or protector of his country or producer of its wealth, i.e., much more than a brāhmin, a kṣatriya or a vaiśya. His social efficiency is not the measure of his spiritual manhood. The soul which is our spiritual life contains our infinity within it. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

After warning his readers that "his purpose is not to relate the evils of the (caste) system," Radhakrishnan gives an ideal picture of organic society in which the system of castes "is a democracy so far as spiritual values are concerned, for it recognises that every soul has in it something transcendent and incapable of gradations, and it places all beings on a common level regardless of distinctions of rank and status, and insists that every individual must be afforded the opportunity to manifest the unique in him." This re-interpretation of caste by means of a strong injection of unacknowledged Christian principles is typical of Radhakrishnan and of many other modern reformers.

Conclusion

Hinduism, in its practical morality, is fundamentally sound in as much as it follows the spontaneous dictates of human conscience. Virtues and vices are correctly appraised and, in spite of theoretical difficulties regarding man's nature and destiny, life, in its concrete reality, has been given true importance and is systematically ordered. The idea of *svadharma* has been duly stressed and is not very different from our idea of duty of state. Unfortunately, in traditional Hinduism, the person soon became what Swami Vivekananda did not hesitate to call "a slave of society", and the dignity of the person was contradicted by social discrimination. The Christian conception of a *personal* call by God to free persons because He wants to elevate, does not find an adequate expression in Hinduism. *Svadharma* is a purely natural 'duty' consequent upon the individual's place on the ladder of the castes. It is a social obligation rather than a personal vocation.

In modern times, contact with Christianity, either in its religious form or through the medium of a secularism which offers diluted Christian values, has raised a challenge which Hinduism answered by claiming that all the new moral values were in fact contained in the old tradition, provided it is properly understood. This led some Hindu reformers to assume an attitude of self-complacency which can at times be irritating. But we can rejoice because the true ethical values are proclaimed and some good is done, even though not in the name of the Gospel. Moral goodness is the best preparation for the knowledge of the truth.

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Chapter 11

Sin and its Removal

(R. De Smet)

The Vedic people's ethical thought was in terms of *ṛtam* (right action, right behaviour) and *anṛtam,* (wrong action, sin) replaced later on by the similar *dharma* and *adharma*). But what is sin? This question has given rise to many opinions.

— Is it something **physical**? A polluting stain that can be washed away by a ritual bath? Or a dye-stuff which obscures the soul's natural radiance?

— Or is it radically **intellectual,** a mind-disturbing consequence of innate ignorance which correct knowledge alone can efface?

— Is it only a **ritual** mistake due to imperfect training or inattention and to be set right by a correcting rite?

— Or is it **social,** a transgression of the code of laws and customs, whether voluntary or involuntary?

— Is it **external** and public only or chiefly interior and private?

— Is it **deterministic,** an offshoot of our evil but natural impulses?

— Or is it **moral,** consisting in a decision in which our mind and free will are engaged?

— Is it **moral and deterministic,** a *karma* which ripens into painful experiences to be undergone in a subsequent birth?

— Or is it a mere **accident** with no necessary painful sequels?

— Is it **willed by God** so that he can exercise his mercy?

— Or is it a man's intentional **offence** of God who can punish it or forgive the repentant man?

Such various opinions have been held in different ages or by different groups, but some of them have become dominant.

A. Sin in the Vedas

The Vedic poets speak of many kinds of evils (*pāpa, pāpman,* evil in general), disease, distress, anxiety (*amhas*), snares, fetters, hamperings *(pāśa)*, etc. More specific terms for sin (moral wrong-doing, offence of a god, ritual inaccuracy and their painful results) are *enas, āgas, heḍa* or *heḍana,* etc.

In the *Ṛgveda,* a truly religious conception of sin as an offence against the ruling god, Varuṇa, is prominent. How is Varuṇa offended? When men are untruthful or perfidious, cheat in games or gamble excessively, are negligent in worship, disobey their elders, curse and show disrespect. Varuṇa can even be offended unwittingly, out of ignorance, and such sins are put on an equal level with voluntary ones. But a repentant man can pray for forgiveness:

> If we have sinned against the man who loves us, if ever we have wronged a brother, a friend, a comrade, one of the neighbours who are ever with us, or a stranger, thou, O Varuṇa, remove from us that trespass.
>
> If we as gamesters cheat at play, if we have done wrong unwittingly or on purpose, thou, O Varuṇa, cast all these sins away like loosened fetters and let us be thine own beloved (Ṛgveda, V, 85).

Most famous are the Vasiṣṭha-hymns in the seventh Maṇḍala of Ṛgveda. They are inspired by trustful love for the all-seeing god and a touching craving for his forgiving friendship:

> I am searching my heart and wondering: When may I be united with Varuṇa? Will he, without displeasure, accept my oblation? When shall I, rejoicing in mind, behold him gracious to me?
>
> Fain to know my guilt I have questioned the wise; the sages verily have said the same thing to me, "This Varuṇa is displeased with thee."
>
> What has that great wickedness been, O Varuṇa, that thou wouldst slay the friend who sings thy praises? Thou, insuperable Lord, declare it to me, so that, freed from sin, I may quickly approach thee with my homage.
>
> Free us from sins committed by our fathers, and from those wherein we have ourselves offended...
>
> Not our own will betrayed us, O Varuṇa, but intoxication, wrath, gambling, ignorance. The old is near to lead astray the younger. Even sleep removes not all evil-doing.
>
> Slave-like, may I do service to the Bounteous, serve, free from sin, the God inclined to anger (Ṛgveda, VII, 86: 2-7).
>
> Let me not yet, King Varuṇa, enter into the house of clay: Have mercy, forgive me, good Lord.
>
> When I, O Caster of the Stone, move along tremulous like a wind-blown skin:

Have mercy, forgive me, good Lord.
O bright and stainless Varuna,
through want of strength I erred and went astray:
Have mercy, forgive me, good Lord.
In the midst of water, thirst distresses me thy worshipper:
Have mercy, forgive me, good Lord.

O Varuṇa, whatever the offence may be which we as men commit against the gods, whatever law of thine we may through ignorance violate, punish us not, O God, for that iniquity (*Ṛgveda*, VII, 89).

The materialistic conception of sin as a stain which can be washed away by water (Ṛ.V. 1, 23, 22) or fire (X, 164, 3), or as "the snares of Varuṇa" (1, 24, 15) in which the sinner is enmeshed, is not absent from the Ṛgveda, but it becomes more prominent in the Atharvaveda. There also the ritual defects which may frustrate the sacrifice become more important than the transgressions of the moral law.

B. Sin in the Brāhmaṇas

In the Brāhmaṇas, everything is centred on the sacrifice *(yajña)* and its magical efficacy. Sin consists chiefly in ritual mistakes, even if merely accidental. Immoral acts imply guilt only insofar as they prevent ritual purity. Sins are removed by being "sacrificed away" (*ava-yaj*). This is done by a ceremonial confession, in which the sin is publicly "declared" (*nirukta*), and by various sorts of ritual baths.

For instance, during the festival called Varuṇa-praghāsa, the wife of the patron of the sacrifice (*yajamāna*) is requested to confess any sin of adultery she may have committed, "lest she should sacrifice with a secret pang in her heart. When thus confessed, the sin becomes less, since it becomes 'truth' (*vā enaḥ kanīyo bhavati, satyaṃhi bhavati)*. And whatever she confesses not, that indeed will turn out injurious to her relatives" (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa,* II, 5, 2, 20). Since sacrifice is called "truth" (*satyaṃ*), it is by being integrated with the sacrifice by means of that ritual confession that her sin becomes "truth". What matters is the public declaration, not the repentance which may accompany it.

The formulae recited during the baths further show that magical efficacy has by now replaced Varuṇa's forgiving and the latter is only remembered for his "snares". "The expiatory bath belongs to Varuṇa, it is meant to free the sacrificer from Varuṇa...While the priest makes him descend into the water, he bids him say, 'Homage to Varuṇa: downtrodden are Varuṇa's snares!' Thus he delivers him from every snare of Varuṇa, from every (infliction) of Varuṇa" (*Ibid.*, IV, 4, 5, 10-11). Later on, the sacred grass, ghee, a sacrificial cake are thrown into the water and *soma* is poured with the words: "O laving bath, laving thou glidest along. With the help of the gods may I wipe out the sin committed against the gods, and with the help of the mortals that committed against the mortals!" ...Thereupon both (the sacrificer and his wife) having descended, bathe, and wash each other's back. Having wrapped themselves in fresh garments they step out. "Even as a snake casts its skin, so does he cast away all his sins; there is not in him even as much sin as there is in a toothless child" (*Ibid.,* IV, 4, 5, 22-23).

What such rites destroy is something physical rather than moral, which may be found in small children (*Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa,* V, 3), even in children still unborn (*Śatapatha Br.,* II, 5, 2, 22). It may also be accumulated ritually on the head of a man who serves as scapegoat and is chased away at the conclusion of the sacrifice, carrying with him all the sins of the village (Ibid., XIII, 3, 6, 5).

C. Sin in the Upaniṣads

For the sages of the Upaniṣads, sacrifice has become unimportant. No longer does the supreme good consist in health, wealth and other worldy attainments, but in the realisation of the unity of Brahman as the supreme Ātman. "He obtains all worlds and all desires who has found out and understands that Ātman" (*Chandogya Up.,* 8, 7, 1). *Evil* is therefore *whatever prevents the realisation of the Ātman.* It is ignorance *(avidyā)*, desire *(kāma)* and action *(karma)*. Moral transgressions are no longer conceived as offences against Varuṇa, or as disqualifications for the sacrifice, but as obstacles to perfect knowledge. Many texts teach this ethical intellectualism clearly expressed in *Kaṭha Up.,* 2, 24:

> Not he who has not ceased from bad conduct,
> Not he who is not tranquil, not he who is not composed,
> Not he who is not of peaceful mind
> Can obtain Him by intelligence.

Sin belongs to the sphere of ignorance. Where there is perfect knowledge, there is no sin:

> Him who knows (the Ātman) these two do not overcome—neither the thought 'Hence I did wrong', nor the thought 'Hence I did right'. Verily, he

overcomes them both. What he has done and what he has not done do not affect him.

This very (doctrine) has been declared in the verse:

This eternal greatness of a Brāhman
Is not increased by deeds *(karma)*, nor diminished.
One should be familiar with it. By knowing it,
One is not stained by evil actions.

Therefore, having this knowledge, having become calm, subdued, quiet, patiently enduring, and collected, one sees the Ātman just in the ātman. One sees everything as the Ātman. Evil does not overcome him; he overcomes all evil. Free from evil, free from impurity, free from doubt, he becomes a Brāhman.

This is the Brahma-world, O King, said Yājñavalkya.

(Bṛhad-Arṇyaka Up., 4, r, 22-23)

This transcendence has been stressed so strongly that, in some texts, the attainment of perfect knowledge seems to destroy the difference between good and evil, *dharma* and *adharma*:

He is not followed by good, he is not followed by evil, for then he has passed beyond all sorrows of the heart (*Ibid.*, 4, 3, 22).

Its mouth is fire. Verily, indeed, even if they lie very much on a fire, it burns it all. Even so one who knows this, although he commits very much evil, consumes it all and becomes clean and pure, ageless and immortal (*Ibid.,* 5, 14, 8).

So he who understands me—by no deed whatsoever of his is his world injured, not by stealing, not by killing an embryo, not by the murder of his mother, not by the murder of his father; if he has done any evil *(pāpa)*, the dark colour departs not from his face (*Kauśsitaki Up.*, 3, 1).

However, it would not be correct to interpret such texts as a free pass for immorality granted to those who know Brahman (though such exaggeration may have been held by some people who sided with the antinomianism (disregard of all laws) of the earlier Upaniṣads). This is why it is sternly denounced or corrected in some of the later ones: "Not he who has not ceased from bad conduct...can obtain Him by intelligence" (*Kaṭha* 2.24); "As to a mountain which is on fire, deer and birds do not resort, so in men who know Brahman faults do not any shelter find" (*Maitri* 6.18).

Besides, the Upaniṣads which introduced the law of *karma* never denied the influence of actions, good and bad, on their doer.

Concerning this **law of karma,** it may be useful to quote here the sound teaching of the great Vedāntin Śaṅkarācārya in his commentary on *Ved. Sūtra* 3.2.38-39:

> We have no right to assume that the fruit of actions will, at some future time, spring from the so-called *apūrva* [i.e., the "unprecedented" *ad hoc* power postulated by Pūrva Mīmāṁsā] which itself is supposed to be an immediate result of each deed. For that so-called *apūrva* is something of a non-intelligent nature...and as such cannot act unless moved by some intelligent being. And, moreover, there is no proof whatever for the existence of such an *apūrva*. But is it not proved by the fact that deeds are actually requited? By no means, we reply; for the fact of requital may be accounted for by the action of the Lord. **We assume the Lord to bring about the fruits of actions,** not only because no other assumption appears plausible, but also because of direct scriptural statements, such as BAU 4.4.24: "This, indeed, is the great, unborn Ātman, the giver of food, the giver of wealth."

Through this reduction of *karma* to divine rulership, he relativizes it and also by calling it a sequel of ignorance.

But the early *Dharma-sāstra* and the *Mahābhārata* retain the law of *karma* without questioning it.

The *Bhagavadgītā*, however, introduces a new teaching: perform the actions prescribed by your *svadharma* but not out of desire for their fruit (*phala,* i.e., the benefit accruing to their doer); perform them only as an instrument of the Lord and in view of his selfless purpose *(artha)*, which is to keep the world in its due order (*loka-samgraha*); thus your actions will not bind you to any rebirth.

The same *Gītā* introduces also the doctrine of *bhakti* as single-minded faith-and-devotion directed to the sole *Bhagavān.* Such bhakti destroys all sins. It is promised to the largest religious success, as we shall see in E.

D. Sin in Jainism, Buddhism and in the Sūtras

Jainism and Buddhism are heterodox movements, but their conception of sin and morality is not a completely new departure from the orthodox conceptions that preceded it.

The Jaina conception is rather archaic and materialistic. Sin is a subtle kind of matter, "karmic" matter (*karma-pudgala*), which infects the embodied soul or spiritual monad. Error, passion, attachment, laziness and negligence render the monad permeable to that karmic matter. This is why Jainism is a religion of asceticism, continuously bent on detachment through all sorts of abstinences, fasts and other forms of renunciation. These are best practised by the monks and nuns, but the Jaina laity try to emulate the monks and bind themselves through several kinds of vows (*vṛata*). Apart from external austerities, Jainism prescribes also spiritual practices (*prāyaścitta*). These are the voluntary confession of one's faults made to the head of the monastic community, and the performance of the penance he had imposed, besides other internal works, such as pious conversations, readings, teaching and meditation. Repentance is necessary, but there is no place for forgiving, since Jainism does not believe in any supreme God. The effect of confession is produced by the declaration itself and the subsequent expiations.

Buddhism rejects entirely the idea of sin as a kind of physical substance. This is in conformity with its denial of any substance whatsoever, whether matter or self. As in the Upaniṣads, sin is conceived intellectually as one of the consequences of ignorance and desire. It is therefore not expiated by austerities, but removed by right knowledge. As in Jainism, the monastic practice of confession is given an important place, but only as an aid to the attainment of correct knowledge. For the same purpose, long lists of monastic transgressions are made to help the monks examine their conscience and renounce the least trace of self-indulgence. The existence of any kind of God being denied, there is here also no place for forgiving. Buddha himself was not at all a forgiver or redeemer but an enlightener and guide.

The law-books of the orthodox Hindus were written in the form of short aphorisms, called *sūtras*. The elaboration of those *Dharma-Sūtras* may have begun in the time of the Upaniṣads and of Buddha and Jina, but several of them belong to the first centuries of the Christian era. Their outlook on sin is chiefly juridical. They state the accepted rules of morality, classify their transgressions and lay down corresponding punishments or means of expiation. Sin is mainly conceived as a breach of the order of society; internal offences are practically ignored. Expiation is also external and generally public. It consists mainly in penitential rites *(prāyaścitta)*, such as abstinence from food, alms, sacrifices, etc. Often they must be preceded by a public confession, especially for the sins of intoxication and adultery. It is understood that this confession implies repentance of one's sins but what is primarily required is their proclamation.

In the Laws of Manu *(Manu-smṛti)*, whose compilation belongs probably to the second century A.D., internal repentance is more clearly emphasised:

> By confession, by repentance, by austerity, and by reciting (the Vedas), a sinner is freed from guilt, and in case no other course is possible, by alms-giving.
>
> In proportion as a man who has done wrong, himself confesses it, even so far he is freed from guilt, as a snake from its slough.
>
> In proportion as his heart loathes his evil deed, even so far is his body freed from that guilt.
>
> He who has committed a sin and has repented, is freed from that sin, but he is purified only by (the resolution of) ceasing (to sin and by thinking) 'I will do so no more'.
>
> Having thus considered in his mind what results will arise from his deeds after death, let him always be good in thoughts, speech and actions.
>
> He who, having either unintentionally or intentionally committed a reprehensible deed, desires to be freed from (the guilt of) it, must not commit it a second time (XI, 228-233).

However, even the Laws of Manu, while distinguishing voluntary and involuntary transgressions, continue to consider them both as sinful and equally in need of expiation:

> (All) sages prescribe a certain penance for a sin unintentionally committed; some declare, on the evidence of Śruti, (that the same penance must be performed) even for an intentional (offence).
>
> A sin unintentionally committed is expiated by the recitation of Vedic texts, but that which (men) in their folly commit intentionally, by various (special) penances (XI, 45, 46)

E. Sin in the Purāṇas and in the Bhakti Movements

In the Purāṇas the evil prompting to bad actions is attributed to avatarās, such as Mohinī, the "deluding one" (Bhāgavata Pur., 1, 3, 17), or even directly to the Creator, who has instilled in our nature both good and bad tendencies. Creation is the līlā or play produced by the Lord. Its undertones of drama or even tragedy ultimately heighten the divine power and goodness which are displayed in it. There can be no victory of Kṛṣṇa over his enemies unless he first blinds them with ignorance and hatred against himself. Buddha himself is said to be an avatāra sent in the Kālī-yuga "for the purpose of deluding the lord's enemies" (1, 3, 24). Therefore, these enemies, when overpowered by Kṛṣṇa, never plead guilty. This is, for instance, what the serpent-king, Kāliya, says when crushed by the boy Kṛṣṇa:

> By birth, O Lord, we are wicked, born of *tamas* (the causal element of stupidity and wickedness) and unquenched revengefulness. Natural dispositions have a very strong hold on creatures and are difficult to give up. Thou hast created this universe as a product of the three *guṇas* (threefold causal element), endowed with various peculiarities, powers and degrees of strength, as well as with class differences due to progenitors, traces of past actions, and specific forms. We, serpents, are by nature full of deep wrath. How could we, deluded by nature, abandon or escape thy wondrous power *(māyā)* which no one can easily shake off? (10, 16, 56-58).

Since wickedness and passions are but dispositions imposed upon some of the actors in the world-drama, their misdeeds deserve no real punishment. The very moment Kṛṣṇa's enemies are slain by him, their delusion is dissipated and they realise that they are in truth his beloved devotees. When, for instance, a she-devil, called Pūtanā, took the infant Kṛṣṇa in her arms and began to suckle him with her poisoned milk, he drew on her breast with such force that he drained her life-blood. "Her terrifying screams shook the earth with all her mountains, and the heavens with all their planets", and she fell lifeless on the ground. When the people of Braj burned her body, "out of which Śri Kṛṣṇa had sucked the life and which had thereby become at once divested of all sins, there arose smoke as from sandal-wood. Thus, Pūtanā, who had been a child-killer in the world, a she-devil feeding on blood, attained a happy end by suckling Hari (Kṛṣṇa) at her breast, even though with the purpose of killing him" (10, 6, 34 ff).

Similarly, when Kaṃsa was slain in a duel with Kṛṣṇa, he obtained release immediately, because his hatred for him had been a delusion which made him think of Kṛṣṇa hatefully but constantly:

> With a fearful heart he daily thought of, and contemplated, that same Lord, whether he was drinking, speaking, sleeping or breathing, and so he saw before him Kṛṣṇa's very form with the discus in the hand, and attained to it (10, 44, 39).

Together with the idea that sin does not belong to the very being of man, but only to his play-appearance in this world, we find here the characteristic *bhakti* idea that concentration of the mind upon the Lord is the sovereign remedy against all evils, whether physical or moral. However, the generalisation that any steadfast concern for the Lord, even that motivated by hatred, leads to salvation, is a late exaggeration. The earlier teaching of *bhakti* (devotion) as found for instance in the Bhagavadgītā, is a doctrine of virile love. This love may be aroused even in a wicked heart, but then it converts it to righteousness:

> Even if a man of exceedingly vile conduct
> Worships me with undistracted devotion,
> He must be reckoned as righteous indeed
> For he has rightly resolved.
> Swiftly does he become full of righteousness
> And does obtain lasting peace.
> O son of Kunti (Arjuna), know thou for certain
> That My devotee perishes never (*Gītā,* IX, 30-31).

In the Gītā, the intellectualistic conception of sin as a mistake, whether intentional or unintentional, due to ignorance, is found side by side with the religious conception of sin as an offence against a god loved by the devotee. The following stanza exemplifies the intellectualistic conception:

> He who knows Me as unborn, without beginning,
> And as the great Lord of the world,
> He, among mortals, is undeluded,
> And freed from all sins (X, 3).

But in other passages, for instance in Arjuna's hymn of praise after the great vision in which Kṛṣṇa's divine form was revealed to him, we find a genuine prayer for forgiveness:

> For whatever rash word I have used, thinking of Thee (simply)
> as my companion,
> Calling Thee, "O Kṛṣṇa, O Yādava, O Comrade,"
> And unaware of this Thy greatness,
> Whether out of negligence or rather through fondness,
> And for whatsoever disrespect shown Thee in jest,
> While at play or on the bed or seated or at meals,
> Either alone or in the presence of others, I pray, O Unshaken One,
> And ask forgiveness from Thee, the Immeasurable.
> Thou art the Father of the world, of the moving and the unmoving.
> Thou art the object of its worship and its venerable teacher.
> None is equal to Thee, none greater than Thee
> Even in the three worlds, O Thou of incomparable greatness.
> Therefore, bowing down and prostrating my body before Thee,
> I seek Thy grace, O adorable Lord.
> As a father to his son, as a friend to his friend,
> As a lover to his beloved, Thou, O God, shouldst bear with me (XI, 41-44).

As *bhakti* grows in both Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, we find more and more devotees proclaiming its sin-erasing power through the grace of the divine Lord:

> The sheer remembrance of the Name of Nārāyana, says Madhva, takes away the load of sins committed in many prior lives. This is the theft of the popular Thief, the Lord.

Appar, the Śaiva poet-saint rather relies on the purifying effect of a devotee's right knowledge of his loving Lord:

> Like carrion crows alighting on a carcass, evil deeds from the past swarm upon me, delude me, silencing my words of praise for you, O Lord of the universe. Give me right knowledge so that I may shed this....wound ridden with foul disease.

During the first half of our century, Mahatma Gandhi endeavoured to overcome the *communal* sins of intolerance, hatred and violence against other religious or political groups. His arms were, clinging to truth *(satyāgraha)*, abhorrence of harm *(ahiṁsa)* and, in extreme cases, personal fasting. He rejected the *Gītā's* injunction of violent punishing of unjust aggressors and rather considered that the vastness of the killings demonstrated the futility of even the Bhārata war.

Adopting non-violence from his Jaina and Hindu background and specifically from Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*, he made it a positive form of love and did not shun personal suffering, risking even his own death, in his effort to pacify violence-mongering groups, and bring about reconciliation between castes and subcastes, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, or India and England. For him the force of truth and love was much more than a weapon or a tool, it was a spiritual option rooted in prayer and the "inner voice" and essential not only to overcome communal conflict but to live worthily and save one's own soul. Christ-like, he was killed by a violent hand in 1948 after fostering reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims.

Conclusion

When the *Gītā* taught that divine grace *(prasāda)* coupled with the antecedent faith-love of the devotee cancels the remainders of all past actions, it in effect stultified the rationale of the whole theory of karma.

Its teaching attained favour through Rāmānuja, yet did not displace this theory nor the innumerable practices (pilgrimage to holy *tīrthas*, readings of Purāṇas and Māhātmyas, i.e., "glorification" of holy places, repetition of the thousand names of Śiva or the many names of other deities, etc.) through which the Hindu masses seek purification. But most often these practices have lost their "magical" character; they are imbued with a love which does not stop at the invoked deities or *avatāras* but obscurely reaches the *Avatārin* himself.

The Rāmānujian tradition got split into two distinct spiritualities by a highly theological question: does man set into motion the process of his salvation by a spontaneous desire for salvation to which divine grace would then respond? or does God take the initiative and inspire even that first desire?

The *Vāḍa-kalai* school accept the first alternative; theirs is "the way of the monkey": just as a baby monkey has to grasp his mother before she can carry him about, so also the Lord can save those only who first turn to him. The *Ten-kalai* school which opts for the second alternative trusts "the way of the cat": just as the kitten is carried about by his mother without any effort of his own, so also man should be passive within the power of the saving love of God.

Catholics may remember that the same question was solved in *tenkalai* fashion by the Church in 529 but also that excessive quietism was denounced by her as erroneous in 1687. (See NEUNER & DUPUIS, 1915-1922 & 2007).

The theological height and refinement reached by Hindu reflection when contemplating the mystery of God's saving love should not astonish us now, for we know how quickly this mystery won the hearts and minds of the masses after it was revealed by the Gītā and how it has never ceased henceforth to fascinate them.

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Chapter 12

Hindu Calendar and Festivals

(A. Huart)

Previous to this year of grace 1968 no less than 5068 years of the *Kālī-yuga* (age of Kālī) are believed to have passed. More than 420,000 years of this age of ever deepening decadence and misery are still to come. It was preceded by three other *yugas:* the *Dvāpara*, the *Tretā* and the *Kṛta-yuga*, during which men were taller, happier and holier. Like other people in so many old cultures, the Hindu dreamt of a past golden age.

The four *yugas* together run into a *Mahāyuga* of 4,329,000 years. A thousand of these constitute a *Kalpa*. Then Brahma, the "creator", goes to sleep, thus provoking an equally long period of cosmic dissolution (*Pralaya*). When he wakes up, the process starts all over again, and so on indefinitely...

Orthodox Hinduism thus has a cyclic idea of time, each *Mahāyuga* repeating the previous one, dawning in glory and gradually sinking into gloom — a conception shared by other pre-Christian cultures, but opposed to the Christian view of world history as tending from creation to eternal consummation through the unique and definitive events of the Crib and the Cross.

A. Hindu Calendar

Actually these speculations on world ages have no influence on the computation of the Hindu calendar. In India the year 1968 corresponds either to year 2024-5 of the *Vikrama Era* (starting in 57 B.C.), or 1889-90 of the *Saka Era* (starting in 78 A.D.) or 1374-75 of the *Bengali Era*. It is not the place here to discuss the much debated question of the origin of these various eras.

The reckoning of days and months and years is either solar or lunar.

The **solar months** are defined by the progression of the sun through the twelve solar mansions (*Rāśi*), corresponding to the signs of the Zodiac. One month runs from the moment the sun enters one mansion *(saṃkrānti)* to the next saṃkrānti.

The **lunar reckoning** is sometimes called "luni-solar". A purely lunar year would run its course independently of the seasons. Thus the Holi festival might turn up in the monsoon or in winter. For this reason the Hindus have fitted the lunar year into the solar scheme. In order to make up for the shorter lunar year, they add an intercalary lunar month *(adhika)* every third year or so. Thus the shifting of feasts regulated by the lunar calendar is kept within bounds.

The months are: *Caitra* (March-April), *Vaiśākha* (April-May), *Jyeṣṭha* (May-June), *Āṣāḍha* (June-July), *Śrāvaṇa* (July-Aug.), *Bhādrapada* (Aug.-Sept.), *Āṣvina* (Sept.-Oct.), *Kārttika* (Oct.-Nov.), *Mārgaśirṣa* (Nov.-Dec.), *Pauṣa* (Dec.-Jan.), *Māgha* (Jan.-Feb.), *Phālguna* (Feb.-March). Though these are properly speaking the names of the lunar months, in many parts of India they are more commonly used for the solar months.

A lunar month is divided into two halves: the bright half *(Śukla pakṣa)* when the moon waxes, and the dark half *(Kṛṣṇa pakṣa)* when the moon wanes. Generally it is the new moon *(amāvāsya)* which marks the end of a lunar month. Each half month is divided into fifteen *tithis*, or lunar days (slightly shorter than 24 hrs). These tithis are numbered, e.g., Māgha 1st Śukla, 2nd Śukla,....15th Śukla (full moon), 1st Kṛṣṇa,...15th Kṛṣṇa (new moon).

The lunar reckoning is important for our purpose as most of the feasts are determined by it. Thus Holi will always take place on the full moon of the month of Phalguna, or Phalguna 15th Śukla.

B. Feasts and Auspicious Days

No fixed day of the week is set apart for rest and religious duties, but the whole year is, for the orthodox Hindu, a vast round of fasts, vigils, sacred days and festivals.

In a sense each day of the week is a holy day, since it is under the influence of deities. The sun, the moon, the stars and planets are divine beings that must be propitiated. Their malignant or benevolent power is often regarded as determinant. Before a Hindu settles on a course of action, he must make sure that the time is favourable. A Hindu marriage, for instance, will never take place without such consultations. Examples of times regarded as auspicious in various ways and degrees are: the *Uttarāyaṇa* ("Northward progress" of the sun) from the winter to the summer solstice, the bright half of each lunar month, the whole month of Vaiśākha, etc.

Certain days of each month are more especially held as sacred. The most commonly observed is the *Ekādashī*, or eleventh day of both halves of each lunar month, dedicated to Viṣṇu. The higher castes are then supposed to fast. In the same way the 4th of each half is reserved to Gaṇeśa, the 8th to Durgā, the 13th to Śiva.

Some of those sacred days are celebrated with greater solemnity, becoming real popular festivals. The occasion may be the feast of a major god, the commemoration of one of his most resounding exploits, the end of the harvest, or the turn of a season. Such festivals vary in importance, but no less than 125 have been counted. It will be enough here to name and briefly to describe the main ones, most of which are public holidays.

C. Main Festivals

Hindus in general have their New Year's day on the first of the month of Caitra (in April).

Rākhī-Bandhana ("tying on lucky threads"), called in Tamil Nād *Avani Avittam*, is held on the full moon day of the month of Śrāvaṇa (July-Aug.). It commemorates the occasion when Indra's wife saved her husband from the onslaught of the demon Bali by tying a magic string round his wrist. Accordingly, in each family, sisters bind brightly coloured strings on their brothers' wrists. Members of high castes renew their sacred cord. At noon the Brāhmins assemble and go in a body to a river or a tank where they bathe; a sacrificial fire is lighted, into which the old cord is thrown before the new one is put on.

For most Hindus this has become a purely social feast.

Kṛṣṇa-Jayantī, or *Gokulaṣṭamī:* on the 8th of the dark half of Śrāvaṇa (July-Aug.) the Vaiṣṇavas all over India celebrate the birthday of Kṛṣṇa. From the beginning of the dark fortnight the god's praises are sung at musical recitals. After the seventh day, at midnight, a special worship is held. In many houses a room is set apart to represent the prison where Kṛṣṇa was born and the stable where he was transferred, with colourful images of the god, his mother Devakī, his murderous uncle Kaṃsa, etc. Dishes of sweets are presented to the child-god, and then eaten by the inmates of the house.

After the strictly religious rites processions of singing and dancing devotees pass through the streets; this is chiefly practised in Bengal.

Gaṇeśa Caturthī, or *Vināyakī Caturthī:* this feast, called *Pillaiyar Cayutī* by the Tamilians, is kept on the 4th of the bright half of Bhadrapada (Aug.-Sept.) by all classes except the strict Vaiṣṇavas. Gaṇeśa, the jolly, pot-bellied elephant-god, son of Śiva and Pārvatī, is invoked for sagacity and patience in business or studies. At noon an image of the god, surrounded with lamps and mirrors, is placed on a platform in the house. Rice puddings—of which the god is said to be very fond—flowers and dūrvā grass are presented. Schoolboys and students keep their books before the image, which is sprinkled with red-dyed rice and walked around. Similarly, artisans offer up their tools. In the evening lamps are waved with accompaniment of hymns. On this night it is very inauspicious to look at the moon on account of a curse cast upon it by the god. A few days later the statue is taken in procession to a river and immersed.

This was originally a harvest festival in thanksgiving for the early crops and propitiation in view of the later ones.

Mahālāya Amāvāsya: each new moon in the year is dedicated to the commemoration of the Pitṛs or Manes of the household, but more especially so is the new moon that brings the month of Bhādra (Aug.-Sept.) to a close. The spirits of the forefathers are then supposed to leave the abode of Yama, the lord of the dead, and to come back on earth. Pious Hindus will propitiate them during the whole of the dark fortnight, but they must do so at least on this last day; otherwise a curse hangs over them.

The day is marked by a Śrāddha (commemorative meal). The Pitṛs are called upon to come and share the food under the guise of Brāhmins invited for the occasion. Balls of rice are presented to the spirits and then thrown into fire or fed to a cow.

Navarātra (festival "of nine nights"): from the first to the 10th of the bright half of Āśvina (Sept.-Oct.) India celebrates its most popular and most colourful festival, commonly known as Pūjā holidays. Broadly speaking it is dedicated to Sarasvatī in the South and the West, to Durgā in the rest of the country.

Sarasvatī, the gentle and refined wife of Brahmā, seen in her pictures with the vīṇā in her hands and a peacock at her side, is the goddess of speech and learning. On the last three days of Navarātra she is more elaborately worshipped. An image of the goddess, or at least, in its place, a dish of rice topped with a coconut, is brought into the house; toys and books are displayed around it. In the evenings Sarasvatī's praises are sung while sweets and pān go round. At noon the head of the family performs pūjā; all present stand with flowers in their hands. Then the fast, strictly kept thus far, is broken by a sumptuous feast.

Durgā, the wife of Śiva, seen in her image treading underfoot the defeated buffalo fiend Mahiṣa, is especially popular in Bengal. Though she brandishes weapons in each of her hands, she is often depicted with sweet and peaceful features and venerated as a benevolent mother.

During the whole Navarātra Durgā's devotees will take only one meal of fruit and milk-sweets a day. On the 6th day statues of her, made for the occasion, are erected in private houses, or even in many quarters of the town, in which case they are paid for by subscription. A priest calls on her to come and reside in the image. The next days she is honoured with ceremonial baths, flowers, recitation of mantras and waving of lamps. Goats and buffaloes in considerable numbers are decapitated in her temples. After the evening rites, entertainments are held under the eyes of the goddess, such as theatrical performances, singing, etc. On the 10th day the goddess leaves the statue, which is then carried to the nearest river; there it is left to sink amid loud cheers. People go from house to house to felicitate their friends.

This tenth day (*Dasarā* or *Vijayī*) commemorates also the victory of Rāma over Rāvana.

Dīvali or *Dīpāvali* ("row of lights"): another major festival, which takes place from the 13th of the dark half of Āśvina (Sept.-Oct.) to the 2nd of the bright half of Kārttika. Though all five days are often called Dīvali, they in fact constitute a complex of five different feasts.

1. The first day is the *Dhan Trayodaśī* ("wealth thirteenth"). Shopkeepers tidy their stores and houses, close their accounts and worship an image of Lakṣmī, goddess of prosperity, together with their books and a pile of silver coins.

2. The second day is known as *Naraka Caturdaśī* ("Naraka's fourteenth"), commemorating Kṛṣṇa's victory over the demon Naraka. After a perfumed oil bath each man must put out a lamp with the big toe of his left foot and crush with the same a piece of vegetable (two gestures the symbolism of which is not clear); then everyone puts on new and bright clothes, and spends the day in rejoicing and feasting. In the evening lamps are lit in private houses and Vaiṣṇava temples.

3. The third day is Dīvali proper, also called *Lakṣmī Pūjā* or *Kālī Pūjā* according to places and castes. All over India houses, temples, sacred tanks are ablaze with thousands of small oil lamps. Children let off crackers to their hearts' content. Modern Hindus see in all this a symbol of light dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

Lakṣmī's devotees worship her statue. Around it people display jewels and other signs of wealth; fruit and flowers are offered, after which feasting starts. During the night a vigil is kept; it is then auspicious to gamble in honour of the bounteous but fickle goddess of prosperity.

Kālī has her most fervent devotees in Bengal; on this day they commemorate the dance of the goddess. Intoxicated by her triumph over a demon, Kālī started a dance so wild that the world almost capsized. The gods, very concerned, appealed to Śiva to pacify his spouse, but he failed to do so. As a last recourse he threw himself under her feet. Kālī, finding herself treading over her husband, stopped at once, thrusting out her tongue in shame. This is nowadays interpreted as the awakening of the passionate self to its divine origin. Many goats and buffaloes are immolated in honour of the goddess.

4. On the fourth day Viṣṇu's victory over the demon Bali is celebrated. This is the feast of cattle: cows and horses, gaudily caparisoned, are worshipped, regaled and taken in procession about the streets.

5. The fifth day is called *Bhrātr Dvitīya* ("Brothers' second"). Boys are invited to a grand meal by their sisters or cousins. Presents are exchanged; setting of lights and feasting go on unabated. This is nowadays a purely social feast.

Mākara Saṃkrānti (Poṅgaḷ): the winter solstice falls approximately on January the 12th and is the only really popular solar festival of the year. It is supposed to inaugurate the daytime of the gods and the auspicious season for men. In many parts of India it coincides with the harvest. The festivities last for three days. The sun is worshipped in courtyards under the form of red diagrams. Bathing in sacred rivers is recommended as well as alms-giving to Brāhmins. Sugared sesame should be eaten to free oneself from sins.

Nowhere in India are the celebrations grander than in Tamil Nād, where the feast in called *Poṅgaḷ*. Sons and daughters flock home, as is done elsewhere for the Pūjā holidays. New pots are bought for the household; in the finest one rice is boiled with milk and sugar. Members of the family anxiously watch operations as quick boiling means good luck for the coming year. When it is completed, everyone shouts *Poṅgaḷ*, i.e., "It is boiling!" Rice is offered up and eaten by the family group with all sorts of sweet foods.

On the next day, the *Mattupoṅgaḷ*, cows, bullocks and buffaloes are washed, decorated, paraded and fed with sweet cooked rice.

Sarasvatī Pūjā (or *Śri Pañcamī*): In those parts of India where Sarasvatī is not worshipped during the great Pūjā holidays, compensation is made on the fifth day of the bright half of Māgha (Jan.-Feb.); it is a spring festival as well. Things take place much in the same way as described above for the last day of the Navarātra in the South. Every Hindu schoolmaster puts up an image of the goddess (in Bengal she is mounted on a swan, elsewhere generally on a peacock) and friends and patrons of the school are invited to share in the festivities. Offerings are often made in money, which may form a substantial part of the teacher's annual income. In the evening the statue is paraded through the streets amidst acclamations.

Mahāśivarātri: on the 13th of the dark half of Māgha (Jan.-Feb.), "the great night of Śiva" is celebrated as a festival of importance all over India; it is dedicated to Śiva under the symbol of the *Liṅga*. Once, they say, Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva were discussing about their respective supremacy. Śiva challenged the other two to touch the ends of a pillar of fire representing the Liṅga: this they failed to do. Another story has it that on this night a confirmed unbeliever inadvertently muttered Śiva's name and dropped bilva leaves by accident on a Liṅga, and thus gained automatic salvation.

A fast is kept during the whole tithi, and a vigil at night, especially by all unmarried girls who wish to secure a husband as accomplished as Śiva was for Umā. At every third hour of the vigil the Liṅga is worshipped; sets of ritual gestures accompanied by sacred formulas *(mantras)* are executed; the Liṅga is bathed in milk and honey; ketakī flowers and betel leaves are offered. The day is devoted to feasting. Large fairs are held at the twelve Liṅga temples of India.

Holi (also called *Dolayātrā* in Bengal, *Kāman-pandikai* in Tamil Nād, *Kāmandi* in other places) coincides with the full moon of the bright half of Phālguna (Feb.-March). It is celebrated more or less all over India, though not by every caste. In most places it is customary to light a huge bonfire. Passers-by are generously squirted with coloured water.

One legend evoked is that of Holikā, a fiend who used to devour one child a day, which people had to provide in turn. Came the turn of a poor widow's only son. A kind sādhu, seeing the mother in tears, advised her to collect all the children of the place and greet the demoness with a volley of filthy abuse. This was done and, as the sādhu had predicted, Holikā died on the spot. This is why on this day indecent songs and words were regarded as auspicious. The custom is nowadays fast receding.

In Bengal the Dolayātrā (swing festival) evokes Kṛṣṇa's amours with the gopis. During the whole bright half of this month recitals and dances are held, and a statue of the god, placed on a swing, is gently rocked. On the full moon day itself the statue is taken out in procession.

In the South, this feast also commemorates the burning out of Kāma, the god of love. Śiva reduced him to ashes one day with a single spark emitted from his third eye, as a punishment for tempting him to amorous frivolities in the midst of his meditation and frightful austerities. People of the lower castes burn the Hindu Cupid in effigy.

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Chapter 13

Pilgrimages and Holy Men

(A. Huart)

A. Pilgrimages (Tīrtha-Yātrā)

Pilgrimages play an important part in India. Countless Hindus at some time or other in their lives gather a few belongings and set out on the roads to worship the gods. Various motives may prompt them: purification before death, a vow taken in time of sickness, the wish for a son, the call of a freer and more meritorious life. This peregrinating instinct helps to keep Hinduism alive among the masses. The paths of India are constantly trodden by sādhus always ready with an edifying tale. The pilgrims themselves watch pūjās and processions, hear a good deal of preaching and reading of sacred scriptures, and gaze at their gods sculptured in stone. Back home they will hold forth on the subject before their children and neighbours.

There is no numbering the holy places (*tīrtha*) in this country. Almost every village can boast of a sacred tank, spring, tree, hilltop, shrine or hermitage. Let us mention here only a few major centres whose names have become bywords in every Hindu household.

Pride of place should be given to the *rivers*, more especially: Mother Gaṅgā, who leads straight to heaven anyone whose ashes she receives; the Godāvarī, who saw Rāma hunting on her banks; the Kāverī, a favourite resort of fairies; the Narmadā and the Kṛṣṇa. The best way of worshipping a river is to walk up from its mouth to its source and down again along the other bank.

Among holy cities none can rival Banaras (*Varānasi*), where the pilgrim may visit over two thousand shrines. At Vṛndāvan, on the Jumnā (*Yamunā*), he may still hear, they say, Kṛṣṇa's flute calling for the gopīs (cowherdesses). At Allahabad (*Prayāga*), he will worship the twin sisters Gaṅgā and Jumnā at the point where they meet. Or he may direct his steps to Haridvār, where the Gaṅgā leaves the hills; Ayodhyā, the birthplace of Rāma; Gayā, most auspicious for funeral offerings; Ujjain, with its great Liṅga temple; Pūri, famous for its festivals in honour of Jagannath; Conjeeveram, sacred to the Mother; Madurai, the stronghold of Dravidian Śaivism; or, at the extreme south, Rāmeshvaram, Rāma's base for his onslaught against Lanka (Ceylon). Blessed indeed is the pilgrim who can link in one vast tour the four centres of Badrināth in the Himālayas, Dvārakā in the West, Rāmeshvaram in the South, and Pūri in the East!

Such places hold no less fascination for a Hindu than Compostella, Mount-St-Michael and Jerusalem in the Christian Middle Ages, or Rome and Lourdes for Catholics today. Hindus and Catholics agree in regarding certain spots as particularly blessed.

Many centres are especially frequented at certain times. Allahabad, for instance, sees millions surging up for the great Kumbh Melā every twelfth year. On this occasion the holy men, arrayed according to sect and order, are privileged to enter the sacred waters first.

B. The Priests

Vedic India provides a unique example of priestly civilisation. Its arts and sciences were all strictly subordinated to the ritual. The vast literature of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas was composed for and by the priests. The worlds, stars and gods themselves had come to be regarded as utterly dependent on the priests' sacrificial performance.

Unlike the civic and collegial priesthood of the old city states of Western Asia, these were essentially household priests, and such they have remained. Though at a later date they crystallised into the hereditary caste of the Brāhmins, they never formed a unified hierarchical clergy. They remained also independent of any form of royal theocracy. Through a quasi monopoly of knowledge — and this in the whole field of social, ritual and cosmic law — they wielded a preponderant though ill-defined influence.

From the time of the Upaniṣads the priestly ideal was constantly challenged by that of the knower and of the ascetic. However, society was so much welded to the priestly pattern that the latter largely survived. The codification of the laws of *Varṇas* and *Āśramas* (castes and life-stages) remained in the hands of the

Brāhmins. The Karma-mīmāṃsā school preserved a strictly ritualistic approach. The great theistic revival around Śiva and Viṣṇu brought with it a resurgence of ritual priesthood.

But in the course of time the idea of Brāhminhood largely dissociated itself from that of ritual duties. The Brāhmins increased in numbers and exercised more remunerative functions. The superior type among them was henceforth the learned exponent of Brāhmanic lore. Today it may be said that only that Brāhmin who cannot find any other occupation, officiates as priest.

As a consequence the professional priests *(purohit, yājak, pūjāri)* enjoy little prestige, possess little education, and are not expected to be especially zealous or disinterested.

The most respected of them is the *family priest (Kula-purohit),* who lends his services to orthodox and well-to-do households. He attends at all the births, initiations, weddings and funerals of the family. In a room set apart in the house he officiates at all pūjās, and he bathes, anoints and propitiates the image of the gods. Often he adds to these functions those of astrologer, physician, exorcist and spiritual adviser. For all this he receives fees. Poorer people share the services of one purohit; in a village there is often only one for all. The social status of this Brāhmin varies according to the caste of the community he serves.

The *temple priests* are regarded as a less respectable group. In Rāmakṛṣṇa's biographies Hindu authors always dwell at length on his scruples before accepting a post in the temple of Dakṣiṅesvar.

Though similarities can be found between the Hindu and Catholic ideals of priesthood, divergences go much deeper. For Catholics the priest is the minister of the *supernatural* order of salvation. He is chosen by God as His instrument in the Church. As the bearer of God's saving grace he gathers our offering and love in the Eucharistic Christ. He is the representative among men of God's initiative of love, and is expected to let it appear in all his life. Among Hindus, on the other hand, priesthood is a hereditary and natural specialisation, a craft which, of itself, does not call for much generosity and zeal.

C. The Gurus

If the *purohit* commands but scant respect, the *guru* or spiritual guide incarnates the highest values a Hindu may look for in any man. The word can be used loosely, yet it is rooted in a well-defined, one might say "sacramental", institution.

Without a guru no one can become a "twice-born" (*dvijā*), that is, a caste Hindu. At the initiation, it is the guru who hands over the sacred thread and whispers the sacred formula (*mantra*) whose secret must remain sealed to everyone else. The disciple should then go and live at his guru's for a minimum of twelve years. It is doubtful whether this was ever commonly observed. At any rate, initiation and teaching were soon symbolically condensed into the span of a few hours. The guru is supposed to enjoy lifelong authority; in practice it amounts to little more than a baptismal godfather's right of vigilance. The part is often taken by the family or the village priest. A Brāhmin is not required; however, in conservative circles, one may be selected from among the most venerable. He should visit his disciple at least once a year and be received with elaborate demonstrations of respect.

There is a yet deeper and more exclusive meaning of the word 'guru'. Without a guru no one can hope to reach liberation *(mukti)*. Neo-Hindus often advertise Vedānta for anyone who cares to study their books. This is diametrically opposed to Hindu tradition. The select few who felt qualified for the highest reaches of spirituality, had first to go in search of a guru. At his feet they would be tested and gradually initiated. To him they would submit with unquestioning obedience, regarding him as the sole and all sufficient source of truth. It was not just a question of assimilating a doctrine, but of transposing one's whole being to a different plane of existence.

Rāmakṛṣṇa illustrates this by a parable in the traditional vein. An old tiger once found a cub which, at its parent's death, had been adopted by sheep, and looked on itself as a sheep. The old tiger knew words would not help much. He took the cub along for a hunting season, showed him his sharp teeth reflected in a brook, made him taste warm blood. Thus finally the cub awoke to its own tigerhood.

A guru in the fullest sense of the word should be a *jīvanmukta*, that is, "one who has obtained liberation before death". He thus lives on a double plane: at the apex of his soul he enjoys that experience which negates all common experience, and on the common experimental plane he strives to draw the disciple's inner eye to his own level, as one directs an inquirer's gaze to a star.

The *jīvanmukta guru* represents much more for a Hindu than the spiritual father for a Christian. The latter is still on his way towards salvation; the former has reached his goal. The latter is fallible and lends his advice and experience to second the work of grace; the former is infallible: he has become truth itself. He holds the keys of *mukti*, so that no one will be saved unless he be initiated by a guru.

D. The Sādhus

In the primitive scheme of the four *āśramas* (stages of life) lifelong asceticism was not encouraged. Only when a man's hair turned white was he allowed to proceed to the forest and live there as a hermit *(vanaprastha)* and later as homeless wanderer *(saṁnyāsī)*. On the other hand every caste Hindu was supposed to do so. All this was never put into general practice; however, even today, quite a few old people take to a solitary life, retire to Banaras, or more simply, build a hut for themselves not far from the family compound.

More or less on the margin of orthodoxy there had always existed groups of ascetics. When Brāhmanism found itself faced by the essentially monastic heresies of Jainism and Buddhism, it gradually evolved its own orders of *sādhus*. This development came later and in a much looser form than among Buddhists, but it attained vast proportions. *The Census of India* provides us with the first statistics: in 1901, it listed 1,142,157 persons in the categories: Hindu *faqīrs*, *yogīs* and *nāthas*. Half of these were females: wives of sādhus or widows. In later surveys the numbers remained substantially the same, which does not exclude, a decline as later surveys were more thorough. The monasteries, or *Maṭhs*, are mostly confined to the North; few are found South of the Narmadā.

The words *sādhu*, *saṁnyāsī*, *yogī*, *vairāgī*, *faqīr* are often used synonymously. The first one is the most generic; the specific meaning of the others will be given below.

Śaiva Sādhus. It is among the Śaivas that ascetical sects first developed. Is not Siva himself seen meditating in cremation grounds, with his hair matted and his body grey with ashes? The *Pāśupatas*, an early sect, can be traced back at least to the first centuries A.D.

The Śaiva sādhu is distinguishable by his sect mark: generally three horizontal lines or a broader band drawn with ashes on the forehead and other parts of the body. The body may also be entirely besmeared with ashes. Rosaries of rudrākṣa beads, a trident, a leopard skin are among the possible insignia. This is all subject to endless variations.

Śaṅkara, the great Advaita exponent, is credited with no less genius as founder of a religious order. At the four quarters of India he planted monasteries of Saṅnyāsīs, the first of their kind, called *Daśanāmī Saṁnyāsīs* ("monks of the ten names," i.e., whose order is divided into ten branches). These centres, real fortresses of Hindu and Advaita orthodoxy, are situated at Pūri in the East, Dvārakā in the West, Jośi in the Himalayas, and Śriṅgeri in the South. They later divided and formed smaller institutions of the same type. The abbot of Śriṅgeri is recognised as the head of all the followers of Śaṅkara and enjoys a high prestige among Hindus in general. The stress in this order is put on the way of knowledge of Advaita Vedānta. Celibacy is not obligatory in all the ten branches. Some of those branches are restricted to Brāhmins, others not. *Daśanāmī saṁnyāsīs* are also sometimes called *Ekadaṇḍī* on account of their one-knotted staff.

To each of the Daśanāmī branches, there is attached one section of *Daśanāmī Nagās*, or militant sādhus. Formerly these went about fully armed and constituted real regiments. Were they first meant as a protection against Muslims? It is very doubtful. Anyway, history attributed to them more feats of valour against the Vaiṣṇavas than against foreign invaders. The centres where they reside are called *Ākhādās*. Śūdras are freely admitted among them. They are now dwindling in numbers and have lost all military character. Leaving speculations to the saṅnyāsīs, they concentrate mostly on bodily asceticism and gymnastics.

Another order of Śaiva sādhus is that of the *Yogīs*. They are followers of Gorakhnāth, a late (perhaps 10th cent. A.D.) populariser of Haṭhayoga, a special type of yoga which aims at mystical liberation by physiological means: it is heavily mixed with Tantrism and Śaktism. This leads to serious perversions among ascetics of this school. They are not supposed to marry, but the rule is generally ignored; anyway Śakta practices would not allow them to remain truly continent. They indulge in magic and are often addicted to intoxicants as a stimulant for their yogic trances.

The largest and most respectable group is that of the *Gorakhnāthīs*, or *Kānphāṭa Yogīs*, so called because their ears are pierced for huge ear-rings. They possess a large number of maṭhs chiefly East of Banaras and North of Bombay; around these can be seen the tombs of yogīs, before which worship is daily performed.

Most disreputable of all are the *Āghorī Yogīs*, now small in numbers. They drink out of a skull, preferably human, make it a point to eat dung and the flesh of corpses, and refrain from human sacrifices only for fear of sanctions.

In every town where the sect of the Liṅgāyats counts many followers, these are looked after by priest-ascetics living in maṭhs and called *Jaṅgamas*.

Vaiṣṇavasādhus. Among Vaiṣṇavas sādhuism seems to have developed later. Āḷvārs of Tamil Nād may represent the first approach to it. Organised orders are not traceable further back than the twelfth century. Whereas the Śaiva Saṅnyāsīs stand solidly behind Śaṅkara's Advaita, the Vaiṣṇava *Vairāgīs* (from *virāga*, detachment) are divided into numerous schools: followers of Rāmānuja, Madhva, Nimbārka, Rāmānanda, Vallabha, Caitanya, Kabīr, etc. The maṭhs of Vairāgīs constitute the solid core of a more or less large following of laymen, from whom the way of life of the monks is less sharply contrasted than is the case among Śaivas. In particular they lay little stress on bodily asceticism.

The sect mark consists of two white lines in the shape of a V drawn with chalk on the forehead; a third line, either white or red, is often added in the centre. Theoretically the dress should be white. The rosaries are made of tulasī (sacred basil) beads.

There are also separate centres of Vaiṣṇava *Nagās*, or militant sādhus. These came later than their Śaiva counterparts, and were presumably meant as a protection against them.

The practices and customs of the Vaiṣṇava sects vary greatly according to doctrinal allegiance. An account of their theology is given in another chapter.

In recent times (1899) an important order, the Rāmakrishna Mission, was founded by Vivekananda; many of its externals were borrowed from Christian monasticism. It has several centres in India, and even a few in Europe and in America.

Customs and Organisations. Free vocations are by no means rare in India. However, it is a well-known fact that sādhus recruit mostly among orphans and children either abandoned or vowed by their parents to this life. In principle no one should be admitted before he comes of age; the rule is not generally observed. All sects nowadays complain of the growing scarcity of recruits.

A candidate should first be tested. When the guru is satisfied with his progress, he may be received into the order. The rites of initiation vary from sect to sect: a new name, a sacred *mantra* and the monastic dress are given; a funeral ceremony is sometimes performed to signify death to one's caste. At this or at some other time the young sādhu takes vows: to practise *ahiṁsā*, not to engage in trade, not to take employment, etc., according to customs. The vow of celibacy is not everywhere imposed. Where it is imposed, it is not often enforced, and where it is enforced, it may be, in some sects, tempered by practices either of Śakti or of a more sensuous type of Bhakti.

Gradual initiation under the guru is foreseen. A learned ascetic of long standing may claim the title of *Paramahaṃsa* ("supreme swan"); from that time onward he stands above the rules of his monastery. After death a sādhu is not cremated but buried.

An ascetic belongs to the maṭh of his guru. Monasteries may be large or small, crowded or deserted. Some are meant for women only. A few sādhus and novices can usually be found in residence. The others roam about, or, unhampered by their vows, settle as traders and agriculturists. The abbot, or *Mahant,* looks after the discipline and administration. Most sects recognise some loose form of central authority.

Many monasteries are quite rich. The revenues are drawn from temples, properties, tenanted houses. This is often supplemented by interest resulting from local banking. Rare is the sādhu who has to beg for his maintenance outside touring time. Some teaching in Sanskrit and other sacred subjects may be imparted to novices and visitors. A few more progressive sects have started schools, dispensaries or gośālās, but rarely on a large scale. Hospitality is readily granted to all. Beggars are fed every day. A wandering ascetic may stop at a monastery akin to his own, or at one of the dharmaśālās built by generous patrons.

Inside the maṭh the daily routine is free enough. Worship in the temple, various tasks about the house, some practice of yoga, religious reading and discourses may fill the long hours. Many take only one meal a day. Fresh news is always circulating as sādhus from all parts of India come and go.

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Chapter 14

Rituals and Worship

(R. Antoine)

The immense variety of religious practices in Hinduism makes it impossible to give here a detailed account of the Hindu ritual. The caste, the sect, the religion are the main causes of diversification, together with the special circumstances of city life which make a faithful observance of the ritual more difficult. But, although ritual orthodoxy is on the decline among the urban population, it would be a mistake to think that it is dead. In the villages and in many homes in the cities, religious practices are faithfully observed and give the devotees spiritual comfort.

A. Daily Practices in the Home

A Brāhmin is, by caste, the Hindu whose existence is completely under the sway of ritual. The other castes model their religious practices on the pattern of Brāhmin life. If, therefore, we follow the course of a Brāhmin's daily life, we shall have a general idea of the ritual duties of all Hindus. Rising before sunrise, a Brāhmin is careful to avoid the sight of inauspicious persons or objects. A widow, a sweeper, a barren woman are inauspicious. A ring, a cow, a little child are auspicious. His right foot must touch the ground first. Once out of bed, he rinses his mouth three times and winds his holy thread round his neck and over his right ear. After the morning toilet, he wears his holy thread round his neck and is allowed to break silence. He cleans his teeth, rinses his mouth and bows to the sun. The morning bath follows, preferably in a river, concluded by a prayer to the sages, the gods and the ancestors. Then begins the *Prātahsandhyā* or morning prayer, which must be completed before the sun rises. Seated on a low stool and facing the east, with his sacred thread hanging from his left shoulder, he sips water, pronounces sacred formulas *(mantras)* over the ashes which he has brought with him and marks his forehead, his arms, ribs and knees with them. He ties his hair. Closing one nostril after the other, he exhales and inhales, repeating the famous *gāyatrī* mantra:

> *Tat Savitur vareṇyam*
> *bhargo devasya dhīmahi;*
> *dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt.*
>
> *On that desirable (splendour) of Savitṛ (the Sun),*
> *on that splendour of the god, let us meditate;*
> *our minds may he himself stimulate.*

Then closing both nostrils and bending his head he repeats mentally the same *mantra* four times. The whole process is repeated three times. He then formulates his intention *(saṅkalpa)* to be purified of his sins. Water is sprinkled to dispel the demons. More water is poured as a symbol of the bath being freed from demons for the sun to rise. A prayer to the sun follows. The *gāyatrī* mantra is repeated 108 times on a rosary counting as many beads. Often the morning worship is concluded with different positions of the fingers which symbolise different petitions.

The morning *homa (oblation)* is an offering of ghee, curds and rice to the fire, and must precede the first meal. *Homa* is followed by *svādhyāya,* or spiritual reading: the right hand is placed successively in front of the mouth, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the lips, the top of the head, the chin, the forearms, the navel and the back in order to obtain the protection of the gods, the *gāyatrī* is repeated and the reading of a sacred book begun.

The ceremony of *tarpaṇa* (propitiation) follows. After sipping water, the worshipper sits facing the east, his sacred thread hanging over his left shoulder, and pours water from his straightened fingers. This is *Deva-tarpaṇa* (propitiation of the gods). Then he faces the west, his sacred thread hanging round his neck, and he pours water between his two little fingers, the hands being held in the form of a cup. This is *Ṛsi-tarpaṇa* (propitiation of the sages). Then he sits facing the south, his holy thread hanging from his right shoulder and pours water between the base of the thumb and the first finger of his right hand. This is *Pitṛ-tarpaṇa* (propitiation of the ancestors).

The next item on the daily programme is the *deva-pūjana* (worship of the deity). Usually a small room is reserved in the home as a kind of private oratory where the image of the favourite god *(iṣṭadevatā)*, the image of other gods and the various utensils used in worship (bell, copper vessel, spoon, sandal-wood paste, incense, conch-shell, etc). are kept. The water used in the *pūjā* must be blessed. The blessing of water is done as follows: the worshipper holds his right hand above the copper vessel containing the water and, bending down the fore-finger, moves the hand up and down, mentioning the names of the great pilgrimages and holy rivers. Then he holds his hand in the form of a cow's udder over the water, symbolising thus the coming down of nectar. The water thus blessed is sprinkled over the utensils of the worshipper. The special prayers and gestures of the worship depend on the deity who is worshipped. The worship is usually completed by a prayer asking for the forgiveness of sins.

Such are, in short, the morning devotions of a devout Brāhmin: *snāna* (bath), *sandhyā* (morning prayer), *homa* (sacrifice to the fire), *svādhyāya* (spiritual reading) and *devapūjana* (worship of the deity). It is evident that many Brāhmins do not dispose of the time necessary to perform all these duties entirely. For their sake, an abbreviated ritual is foreseen. Many Hindus who have given up the long morning ritual remain faithful to the daily recitation of the *gāyatrī*.

A *sandhyā* is also performed at noon and in the evening. It must be noted that all the members of a family are not bound to perform the rites. Usually, the head of the family alone does it in the name of all.

B. Sacrifices

The great Vedic sacrifices are no longer celebrated. They have been replaced by the *pūjā* of home and temple deities. There are, however, five great sacrifices which have preserved much of the Vedic tradition and are occasionally performed by wealthy Hindus anxious to assure their liberation or that of some relative or friend.

The *Mahārudra* Sacrifice is believed to wash away the sins of the person for whom it is offered, whether he be alive or dead. Eleven Brāhmins officiate as sacrificers *(hotṛ)*, one as *ācārya* (guide), one as *brahmā* (protector), one as *sadasyapati* (scriptural guide), one as *ganapati* (supervising the proper recitation and pronunciation of the *mantras*), one as *upadrastṛ* (general supervisor). Four more Brāhmins act as doorkeepers, to keep the demons away. The fire lit at the beginning must burn continually for the five or eleven days during which the sacrifice lasts. The god Rudra and attendant deities are installed. Worship is going on the whole time and every evening there is *āratī* (waving of lamps).

Gāyatrī-purascaraṇa. A householder is expected during his life to repeat the *Gāyatrī* 2,400,000 times. Towards the end of his life, if he has doubts regarding the fulfilment of that duty, he may perform, the *Gāyatrī-purascaraṇa.* A number of Brahmins are invited who will recite the *gāyatrī* during several days until the number is completed. The ritual resembles that of the *Mahārudra.* While the mantra is recited, ghee is continually poured into the fire.

There are finally three great sacrifices meant to propitiate Candī, the consort of Śiva. Brāhmins are employed to recite the *Candī-pātha* (a passage of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* containing 700 stanzas) in honour of the goddess. The simplest form of the sacrifice is to repeat the 700 stanzas 100 times. The second and better form is to repeat them 1,000 times. The third and best form is to repeat them 100,000 times. "I once saw a regular encampment of Brahmins, when the wife of a ruling chief of Kathiawar was having this ceremony performed. Five hundred Brāhmins spent one hundred and five days over the repetition. The cost of the ceremony was 350,000 rupees. In the *Homa* sacrifice at the close so much clarified butter was offered that the smoke of the fire was visible for twenty miles around."[1]

Sacrifices in the temples will be mentioned presently.

The word 'sacrifice' *(yajña)* is also used in a broader sense for the five great sacrifices *(mahāyajña)* which a householder must offer every day. According to the *Manu-smṛti*, they are:

Adhyāyanaṃ brahmayajñaḥ: "reading the Holy Scriputure is the sacrifice to Brahma"; *Pitṛyajñastu tarpaṇam:* "the sacrifice to the ancestors is the propitiation" (see above); *Homo devayajñaḥ:* "the *Homa* sacrifice is offered to the gods"; *Balirbhūtayajñaḥ:* "the feeding of animals is offered to the elements"; *Nṛyajño 'thitipūjanam*: "hospitality is the sacrifice offered to men".

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[1] Mrs Sinclair Stevenson, *The Rites of the Twice-Born*, p. 351.

C. Temple Worship

A Hindu temple is the sanctuary of a god or a goddess and not a place of public worship. There is no liturgical service for the congregation, and the "sacraments" are not administered in the temple. Crowds of devotees may flock to the shrine, but the priest alone performs the ritual ceremonies without any participation of the laity. Vast courts and buildings may be attached to the temple for the convenience of the pilgrims. But the religious practices which are performed in them have a private character. Some read their holy books, others recite their beads; there are religious songs and religious instructions.

The innermost chamber of the temple contains the symbol of the main god, while other shrines may be built around for other deities. God Viṣṇu and his incarnations are represented by images. The ritual performed every day in their honour is based on a very anthropomorphic conception of the idols, just in opposition to the words of Psalm 113, which sees in the idols mere lumps of clay without sight, hearing, taste or speech. The Hindu priest treats the god as a living person. Before dawn, the god is awakened with sweet music while lamps are waved around him. Then the image is bathed, often by proxy, the image being reflected in a brass plate and the priest performing the gestures of bathing over the reflection. Then the god is dressed and ready to give audience to pilgrims. A light meal is then served to the god; later in the day, a second and more substantial meal is put before him. His clothes are then changed, and, by noon, he is put to rest. Before sunset, refreshments are offered and, at dusk, the lamp-waving ceremony (*āratī*) is performed. After changing the clothes of the god, the priest prepares him for the night's rest.

God Śiva is usually represented by the phallic symbol to which the same kind of ritual is given. In some temples, this 'lingam' is bathed continually.

Animal sacrifices are not offered to Viṣṇu and rarely to Śiva. But the consort of Śiva, Kālī or Durgā, must be propitiated by the shedding of blood. In the court-yard of the temple, V-shaped iron forks are fixed in the ground. Worshippers bring male goats and buffaloes. The priest's assistants pass the head of the animal into the fork and the priest, brandishing the sacrificial knife, beheads the animal. The head must fall at the first stroke of the knife, otherwise the sacrifice is not auspicious. With the blood flowing from the trunk the worshippers smear their forehead. The cult of Kālī may be a survival of the ancient cult of the Goddess Mother, but modern devotees see in her a very personal goddess who has the power to curse and to bless and must be propitiated. In the city of Calcutta, when buses and trams pass before the street where the Kālī temple is situated, it is not uncommon to see several persons bring their folded hands to their forehead and pay their homage to Mother Kālī.

Private worship in the temples consists in offering prayers and oblations between the regular intervals of the priestly ritual, when the gods give audience to the public. The worshipper gives his offering to the priest, bows before the image, goes round the temple with his right side turned towards the deity and, at the end, receives from the priest a little part of the offering which has been presented to the deity. That is called the *prasāda.* Vows also can be taken for the obtaining of a favour. In the Kālī temple of Calcutta, there is a 'tree of fertility'. Women desirous of a son go to the Ganges, pick up a stone from the river and tie it to one of the branches of the tree. If a male child is born, the first lock of hair is offered to the tree. *Ex voto* offerings are of all kinds: flags, bells, jewellery, toy babies, models of the part of the body which has been cured from sickness. Votaries can also promise acts of self-mortification, such as walking round the temple a fixed number of times, covering the distance to the temple by continuous prostrations, taking their food without salt, etc.

D. Special Observances

Leaving for the next chapter the observances relating to birth, initiation, marriage and death, we shall confine ourselves to religious practices which do not make a part of the regular home or temple worship.

1. *Astrology and omens.* The exact moment of the child's birth is carefully noted. The astrologer composes the horoscope, which becomes the most important document to be consulted before all the great events of life: the choice of a profession, marriage, and the choice of the bride. Horoscopes are not easy to interpret and the professional advice of the astrologer is often required. The future character of the child is described in the horoscope and such details as the colour of the clothes he should wear. Every little detail has a

significance: the colour of the eyes, birth-marks, etc. The extent to which astrology determines the life of Hindus, even of many educated Hindus, is unimaginable. A boy, for instance, will at times be forced to undertake studies for which he has no inclination at all, because the astrologer has decided that his future prosperity depends on a certain profession.

2. *The days of the week* carry with them auspicious and inauspicious regulations.

Monday (Somavāra) is specially dedicated to god Śiva. On Monday, cloth and shoes should not be bought, and no one should start an eastward journey. Monday is auspicious for birth and wedding.

Tuesday (Maṅgalavāra). Maṅgala means auspicious, but is also the name of the planet Mars. A man in whose horoscope Mangala falls in the seventh mansion will be unlucky in his married life. One should not sow any seed, a man should not shave, one should not enter a new house or open a shop on a Tuesday. Travelling to the north is inauspicious.

Wednesday (Budhavāra) is the day of Mercury. A lucky day for the birth of a son, but unlucky for the birth of a daughter. Anything done on Wednesdays will bear double fruit. It is a good day to buy cloth, to start a case in court.

Thursday (Bṛhaspatvāra). Bṛhaspati is the preceptor of the gods. Send your child to a new school on a Thursday. Eat white food (rice, ghee, sugar). Do not travel southward.

Friday (Śukravāra), the day of the planet Venus, is a good day to buy land and trees. Travelling westward should be avoided.

Saturday (Śanivāra), the day of the planet Saturn, is especially dedicated to the monkey-god Hanumān. Saturday is a bad day for almost everything. It is known as a 'slow' day. If you call a doctor on Saturday, you will not easily get rid of him. But it is good to begin a friendship, to engage a servant, to move to a new house.

Sunday (Ravivāra), the day of the sun. Barren women and lepers fast on Sundays. It is a good day to begin the study of the mantras and to travel.

3. *The days of the month.* It is the lunar month which counts. It is divided into the bright fortnight (*śuklapakṣa*) and the dark fortnight (*kṛṣṇapakṣa*). The eleventh day (*ekādaśī*) in each fortnight is the holiest of the month and brings luck to any enterprise or journey. Widows and devout Hindus fast on the *ekādaśī*. Generally speaking,

the first, fourth, ninth and fourteenth days of either fortnight are inauspicious. On the full-moon day *(pūrṇimā)*, women fast till the moon rises. The last day of the lunar month, i.e., the moonless day *(amāvāsyā)*, is dedicated to the ancestors. No sewing is to be done and marriages never take place on that day.

4. *Eclipses.* One day, the demon Rāhu went to steal the nectar of the gods. He succeeded in drinking a few drops, but the sun and the moon saw him and warned god Viṣṇu. The latter threw his discus at Rāhu and severed his head from his body. But the head, which contained a few drops of nectar, remained immortal. It tries to punish the sun and the moon by swallowing them, but can only throw its shadow over them, thus causing eclipses. When the eclipse begins, Hindus bathe and repeat the *gāyatrī*, thus helping the sun or the moon to escape from the defiling influence of Rāhu.

5. *Demons and ghosts.* In order to avoid the evil influence of demons and wicked spirits, the Hindu wears amulets, usually around the arm. The amulet may contain the image of a god, a small bit of paper or bark on which a spell is written, a coil of thread, a tuft of hair, etc. It is very important to drive away evil spirits at the time of birth. Various methods may be used: the skull of a cow smeared with vermilion is put on the wall, the skull of a dog is burnt, old shoes or thorny twigs are put before the door, a sword or a sickle is put under the bed, drums are beaten and conch-shells blown. In the fields, what you would often mistake for scare-crows are in fact scare-devils.

Wandering spirits must be propitiated by offering them a home and worship. Many villages have their tutelary spirit, male or female. It is usually represented by a stone, smeared with vermilion and surrounded by smaller stones. Regular worship is performed: the stone is bathed, smeared with ghee, the vermilion is renewed and fruit and sweetmeats offered. In time of epidemics, the tutelary spirit is especially worshipped and the whole village put under its protection. There are spirits which are so dangerous that they must be worshipped and given bloody sacrifices. Often, the worship consists in a devil-dance in which a 'medium' allows himself to be possessed by the evil spirit and, to the accompaniment of loud and furious music, works himself into a frenzy and proffers oracles.

Exorcism is also in practice. The methods vary from physical violence to the simple recitation of mantras.

Conclusion

Much more could be written about the ritual and observances of the Hindus. But what precedes will suffice to give an idea of the complexity of Hinduism. At times, we are inclined to reduce Hinduism to high speculations about the Absolute. But living Hinduism, besides its intellectual and philosophical content, has all the characteristics of a full-fledged and living religion, including burning devotion and complicated ritualism, along with superstitious and magical practices. The difference between Hinduism and Christianity does *not* lie in the fact that Hinduism is full of superstitions while Christianity has always endeavoured to avoid them. Witchcraft had, in the Middle Ages, a great attraction for Christians, and there have always been popular practices and beliefs among Christians which do not essentially differ from what the simple Hindu does and believes. Friday 13th, 13 guests at table, the sight of a black cat, spilling salt on the table and placing fork and knife crosswise, etc., are still nowadays considered by many Christians as bad omens. The real difference lies in the fact that the Church has authority to decide what is authentic faith and to condemn practices and beliefs which endanger the purity of faith, while Hinduism does not possess such an authority. The amorphous character of the Hindu faith goes a long way to explain the immense growth of superstition in popular Hinduism. There is also the lingering and half-conscious fatalism, fostered by the doctrine of *Karma,* which produces the latent conviction that life and destiny are under the sign of unavoidable necessity. Hence, the strong belief in astrology.

Regarding ritualism, a deeper study of Hindu rites would lead one to the conclusion that there are among them many treasures which could be assimilated by the Church in its own ritual. By looking at Hindu priests and devotees, we can learn much about the Indian way of praying and of paying homage and reverence to God. If a convert finds our churches and our way of worship unfamiliar, it is because we have transplanted our western ritual into a land where people prayed and worshipped in their own way for long centuries. And the same question always arises: Does conversion to the Catholic faith imply a conversion to western standards and manners? If an Indian shows his respect to a holy place by taking off his shoes, should we insist on wearing shoes or socks, as though that was the only way of showing respect to God? Kissing the altar or the hand of the celebrant makes no sense to the Indian, while touching with the forehead is his normal way of paying veneration. These instances are given here with a view to stimulate reflection. We cannot innovate without the sanction of the hierarchy, and the Church is very wise in not allowing any individual to tamper with the liturgy. But the Holy Spirit is present in every Christian heart. Christians fully aware of their faith must never avoid the problems which christianisation is bound to raise, under the pretext that the hierarchy is there to think them out. It is the prayerful and submissive initiative of the faithful which alone can give the hierarchy the necessary data for their authoritative decisions.

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Chapter 15

The Hindu Saṃskāras

(R. Antoine)

All Hindu children are born equal by nature *(prakṛti),* but the children of parents belonging to one of the three upper classes *(varṇa)* are entitled to receive by means of *samskāras* culminating in marriage the completion required to become members of the sacrificial community of the Indian Aryans. "A man who is single desires, <would that I had a wife so that I may have offspring; would that I had wealth so that I may perform sacrifices.> So long as he lacks them, he thinks himself incomplete." (Bṛ. Ār.Up. 1.4.17)

The terms *samskāra* and *sacrament* come from the same root **kṛ* (to make) + *sa/sam/sams* (a prefix indicating completion, refining, finishing). Thus they signify *an action by which someone (or something) is raised to a special excellence and completion.* Such refining processes appear in various fields (grammar, rhetoric, ethics, etc.) but, like sacrament, *samskāra* pertains in an important way to the realm of religion. In Hinduism, it means *a rite by which a person is sanctified and thus qualified for performing the sacred actions (sacrifices and sacraments) of the Brāhmanic community.* The latter is Brāhmanic because its inner purpose is what the Vedas call the *brahman.* This term designates the formulas and power of the *yajñas,* i.e., of the daily sacrifices by which are fed and praised the gods who maintain the order and prosperity of the world. It is only through the chief samskāra, marriage, that the final hallowing (the last of a series for the boy and the single but total one for the girl) qualifies a couple both for progeny and for offering sacrifices *together.* This hallowing is called *brāhmaṇya* because it sanctifies the three upper varṇas (not the Brāhmins only) for that *brahman.* It makes them equally *dvi-jā,* "reborn".

A series of samskāras sanctifies the male child from conception to birth, growth, initiation, education and finally marriage. Manu

2.27 mentions 12, others 16 samskāras or even more. Nowadays, they are often much reduced in number. Funeral rites are considered a samskāra only by analogy.

A. Birth

A short time after marriage, the ceremony called *garbhādhāna* is performed by the husband. It consists of an offering to the sun and a prayer of husband and wife for the conception of a son. The last prayer of the husband is: "*Dirghāyusaṃvam-śadhāram putram janaya subrate*" ("O faithful wife, give birth to a son who will live long and will perpetuate our line"). Three months after, the *puṃsavana* ceremony, for the obtaining of a son is performed. When pregnancy is in its fourth, sixth and, eighth month, the *sīmantonnayana* (hair-parting) takes place. The husband with various objects such as tufts of kusha grass, a spinning needle, quills of a porcupine, marks the hair-parting of his wife to the accompaniment of prescribed mantras. The three saṃskāras mentioned above are the pre-natal *saṃskāras (gārbha saṃskāras).*

When the time of confinement approaches, the young wife usually goes to her mother's house, where she is the object of great solicitude on the part of all. She must avoid the company of widows and barren women. As soon as the baby is born, the father rubs its tongue with a mixture of rice and barley and gives it some ghee mixed with gold powder to eat. At the end of this rite called *jātakarma,* the father of the baby says: *"Nābhim kṛntata stanamca pratidhatta"* (Cut the navel-cord and give the breast). When the child is four months old, it is taken out for the first time in the open air *(niṣkramaṇa).* The father stands outside, in the evening, facing the moon. The mother puts the baby in his hands and the baby is offered to the moon. The next ceremony is *nāṃakaraṇa* (giving the name) which can also be done on the birthday of the child. Standing on the right of her husband, the mother puts the baby in the hands of the father. Various invocations are uttered according to the day and planet of the birth of the child. Then the father writes two different names on two stones and lights a small oil-lamp before each. That name must be chosen before which the lamp gives a bigger flame. Touching the mouth, the nose, the eyes and the ears of the baby, the father pronounces two mantras, whispers the name of the child in the mother's left ear and in the child's right ear, and puts the child in the lap of the mother. The *Manusmṛti* (II, 31-33) gives the qualities of the name: "A Brāhmin's name should have an auspicious meaning, a Kṣatriya's name should indicate strength, a Vaiśya's name should denote wealth and a Sūdra's name should be despicable. A Brāhmin's name should have the suffix *śarma* (auspicious), a Kṣatriya's name, the suffix *varmā* (armour), a Vaiśya's name, the suffix *gupta* or *datta*, and a Sūdra's name, the suffix *dāsa* (servant). Girls' names should be auspicious, easy to pronounce and without harsh letters, of clear meaning and pleasant to the ear, denote good fortune, end with long vowels and express blessing." On the sixth or eighth month for a boy and on the fifth or seventh month for a girl, the rite of *annaprāśana* (eating the first rice) takes place. In Bengal, it is usually the maternal uncle who gives the child its first meal of rice.

The three saṃskāras given above (*jātakarma, nāmarkaraṇa* and *annaprāśana)* are the saṃskāras of infancy *(śaiśava saṃskāras).* In the first or the third year, the *cūdakaraṇa* (cutting the hair) is performed. There are some minor rites, which we do not mention here, because they are no longer in use. Even those which are described above are no longer observed by many. There are, however, orthodox families which have remained faithful to the old tradition. In urban centres, practically every Hindu family observes the *nāmarkaraṇa* and the *annaprāśana,* even if all the ritual prescriptions are not strictly adhered to. The infancy saṃskāras are common to boys and girls, but usually the rites for girls are not accompanied by the recitation of mantras.

B. Upanayana (Initiation)

This saṃskāra is exclusively reserved to boys. In the set up of modern life, it is no longer possible to follow the ancient traditions. The boys of the three upper castes usually go to public schools and cannot reside with their guru for the period of instruction. Even the canonical age is not strictly observed. A Brāhmin boy is supposed to receive initiation in the eighth year after conception; a Kṣatriya boy, in the eleventh; and a Vaiśya boy, in the twelfth. Nowadays, the initiation takes place at the time of adolescence, for there is a certain latitude allowed by the śāstra. We shall first give an outline of the traditional rite. The father of the boy chooses the *ācārya* (preceptor). The young candidate, shaven except for the śikhā (lock of hair on the crown of the head), bathed, and wearing a silken dress of one piece, stands at the right of the ācārya who pours ghee on the fire and recites the prescribed mantras. A Brāhmin fills the hands of the ācārya and of the boy with water. The ācārya asks the boy: "What is your name?" The boy gives his name, and both let the water fall from their hands. To the accompaniment of relevant mantras, the ācārya holds the hand of the boy, touches his right shoulder, his navel, his heart, his left shoulder, and addresses him by the appellation of *brahmacārin* (practising continence). (The *brahmacārin* is a religious student who, from the time of initiation to the day when he marries, lives with the preceptor and serves him. This type of religious studentship is no longer possible in our times.) Then the ācārya imposes the holy thread, made of three strands of threads. Cotton must be used for the Brāhmins, hemp for the Kṣatriyas, wool for the Vaiśyas. The brahmacārin, then, asks the ācārya to teach him the *gāyatrī*. The ācārya recites the *gāyatrī* verse by verse:

—Om. Tatsaviturvareṇyam-Om-Bhargo devasya dhīmahi. Dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt. (Om! On that desirable [splendour] of the Sun. Om! Let us meditate on the radiance of that god. May he stimulate our thoughts.) Then the three sacred syllables are taught: they are called the three *vyāhṛtis* (sacred utterances) and are repeated after the syllable *Om* and before the *gāyatrī*. They are *Bhūh, Bhuvaḥ, Svar*. The *gāyatrī* is then recited in the proper liturgical way: *Om Bhūrbhuvah svaḥ Tatsaviturvareṇyam Bhargo devasya dhīmahi Dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt Om.* The brahmacārin is then given his staff. A Brāhmin's staff must reach the hair, a Kṣatriya's staff must reach the forehead, and a Vaiśya's staff must reach the nose. With his staff in hand, the brahmacārin goes to his mother and says: *Bhavati bhikṣām dehi* (Madam, give me an alms). He then goes to the other relatives present, and gives what he has received to the ācārya.

From the day of his initiation, the young brahmacārin must perform the various duties described in the previous chapter.

The day of initiation is a great day in the life of a young Hindu. Parents, relatives and friends offer him beautiful presents and the whole ceremony is concluded by a big meal to which many guests are invited. Many Hindus keep the habit of reciting the *gāyatrī* throughout their life.

C. Vivāha (Marriage)

Even when most of the ritual traditions have been abandoned, the marriage ceremony is faithfully kept by the great majority of Hindus. Love marriages and inter-caste marriages are rare, and civil marriages among Hindus are the exception. "Marriage is the real stronghold of caste."

1. *Marriage Preliminaries.* Choosing the bride or the bridegroom is the affair of the parents who often have recourse to the services of a *ghataka,* i.e., a man who is an expert in genealogies and is sure to make the right choice. After all enquiries have been made, the bridegroom's father officially makes a proposal to the bride's father. The latter gives a verbal promise *(vāgdāna)* which is binding provided both families feel satisfied that there has been no fraud or deception. Then an exchange of visits takes place. Relatives of the bride go to the house of the bridegroom to bless him and to get a closer acquaintance with him and his family. Relatives of the bridegroom visit the bride's home with a similar purpose. Presents are made to the bride on all auspicious occasions and the matter of the dowry is discussed. The rule is that bride and bridegroom do not meet before marriage. Nowadays, that rule is still generally observed, although photographs may be exchanged.

2. *The Wedding.* The astrologer is consulted regarding the day and time *(lagna)* of the marriage. In the bride's house, great preparations are afoot. The dress and decoration of the bride and the preparation of the banquet keep all the ladies busy. Female relatives are on duty for several days or weeks and they enjoy it immensely. The bridegroom chooses his 'best men' *(vara-yātrī)* who will accompany him to the house of the bride.

The wedding ceremony is divided into two parts: the giving away *(sampradāna)* and the marriage proper *(pāṇigrahaṇa).*

(a) *Sampradāna.* A host of guests have arrived at the bride's home. The bride, fully adorned, sits in one room, surrounded by sisters, cousins, friends, and receives gifts and presents from those invited. Another room has been prepared for the bridegroom and his party. When he arrives, shouts of joy resound from everywhere. At the appointed time, the bridegroom is taken to the room where the ceremony is to take place and sits, on a special low seat, opposite the bride's father *(sampradātā).* Two Brāhmins are in attendance, representing both families and the giving away of the bride begins, under the direction of the Brāhmins. The genealogies of bride and bridegroom are recited, and the bride's father officially expresses his choice of the young man as his son-in-law. Then the father-in-law gives various objects to the bridegroom, which symbolise the new status to which the young man is raised, and the prosperity which the bride's family wishes him.

The *śubhadarśana*, i.e., the first time bride and bridegroom see each other's face may take place here. At times, it takes place at the beginning of the *sampradāna*. Seated on a flat seat and carried on the shoulders of four relatives, the bride is brought in and made to turn around the bridegroom. She then faces him, the top part of her sari being thrown over the bridegroom's head, and the whole assembly bursts into joyful cries. A married woman, mother of living sons, ties together with kusha grass the right hands of bride and bridegroom. The bride's father, holding the left hand of his daughter, sprinkles her with scented water. Sprinkling holy water on the tied right hands of bride and bridegroom, the father says: "I, N.N. (here he gives his genealogy), give away my daughter (he gives her genealogy) to you (he gives the bridegroom's genealogy)." *Enām kanyām vāsoyugācchaditām sālankārām prajāpatidevatākām tubhyam aham sampradade*. (I give away to you this my daughter decked with clothes and ornaments and devoted to Prajāpati.) The bridegroom accepts with the word *Svasti*.

(b) *Pāṇigrahaṇa.* This ceremony takes place before a blazing fire. After a few preliminary rites, the bride puts her right hand on the bridegroom's right shoulder while the bridegroom pours ghee into the fire and invokes the Vedic deities for the prosperity of the new home. The bride is made to touch the two stones which are used to grind the condiments and is taken round the fire by the bridegroom. While the rite is performed the bridegroom says: *"Aśmiava tvam sthirā bhava"* (Be firm like the stone). The bride offers grain to the fire. A special formula is addressed to the guests inviting them to give their blessing to the bride. The *pāṇigrahaṇa* (seizing the hand) consists in the following: the bridegroom, supporting the folded hands of the bride with his left hand, seizes the bride's right thumb with the right hand and recites the prescribed mantras which are prayers for children, harmony in the family, and happiness. Sitting together in front of the fire, husband and wife accept to live in common. Then the husband, leading his wife towards the door, makes her look at the pole star. She says: "Thou art steady *(dhruva)*, may I be steady in my husband's family." The husband shows the star Arundhatī to his wife and turning towards her, says: "The sky is firm, the earth is firm, the whole world is firm; the mountains are firm, and this wife is firm in her husband's family." The wife replies: "I pay homage to you." The husband says: "May you be long-lived." He then adds: "I bind your heart and mine with the knot of truth. May your heart be mine. May my heart be yours." And he offers something to eat to his wife. The marriage consent is given when the bride, on the request of the bridegroom, takes seven steps, symbolising her acceptance of the bridegroom as her protector, master and husband.

The next day or the day after, the husband takes his wife to his father's house. His dhoti and her sari are tied together and the bride's family bids farewell to the girl who no longer belongs to them. It is then the turn of the bride's in-laws to invite guests to a big party which is the first meal which the young wife offers in her new quality of housewife.

D. Death and Funeral Rites

In the Hindu conception of things, it is the *karma* of one's previous life which determines the time and the modality of death. Beyond death, two possible ways are open. Either the spirit reaches final emancipation *(mokṣa)* or, after a sojourn in the world of the gods, or of the ancestors, or of the demons, where it enjoys the fruit of its good deeds, it has to come back to this world in a body and pay for its sins. Every devout Hindu earnestly hopes that the life which he leads is the last before *mokṣa.* That is why, when death draws near, great care is taken not to omit anything which can assure full purification before the great passage. Gifts are made to Brāhmins, pilgrimages and vows are offered by the relatives and special prayers are recited. Just before death, the dying person is taken from his bed and laid on the floor, in order that he may escape the evil spirits who roam between earth and heaven. Formerly the dying man had to be taken to the bank of the Ganges and die there. Nowadays, this practice is no longer observed. Immediately after death, the body is washed and wrapped into new cloth, gold or silver is put in its mouth, and loud lamentations announce to the neighbourhood that a member of the family has died. A charpoy or a stretcher is brought in, the body is laid on it and four or six men carry it on their shoulders to the burning ghat. Somebody walks ahead with a jar containing fire and the procession of mourners follows. They all shout *"Hari, Hari bol, Gaṇgā Nārāyaṇ, Śiva Rāma."* The chief mourner, i.e., the closest male relative, accompanied by other members of the family and friends, must go bare-footed. At the burning ghat, the body is washed with Ganges water, either by immersion or by sprinkling. The funeral pyre is erected and the body placed on it. Usually some sandal wood is put in the pyre. The chief mourner takes fire from the jar which has been brought from the house and lights the pyre. While the body is being burnt (it takes about three hours) ghee is regularly poured on the fire. Towards the end, the chief mourner walks round the pyre four times, with his left side close to the body. After collecting the ashes, he throws them into the Ganges, takes a bath and returns to the house. Babies under eighteen months, ascetics, lepers and people dying of smallpox are not burnt but buried.

After the burial, a period of ritual impurity follows. That period is shorter for Brāhmins than for members of other castes, and may vary between eight and thirty days. When the defilement caused by death is over, the all-important rite of *Śrāddha* is to be performed. On it depends the destiny of the deceased. As the *Śrāddha* is to be performed by the son, every Hindu is restless and anxious as long as he does not obtain the gift of a boy. A great variety prevails in the ritual of various provinces and castes, and we must confine ourselves to the general description of the ceremony. The son of the deceased, after a complicated ritual of purification, invites the Brāhmins to take their seats and invokes the *Viśvadevas* (a group of ten deities supposed to be sons of Viśva) to take their abode in the Brāhmins. Offerings and worship are made for the ancestors. The Brāhmins are addressed as the living representatives of the gods and the ancestors, their hands are purified and they are served food. At the end of the meal, the son of the deceased asks: "Ye Brāhmins, representing my father, grandfather and great grandfather, are you satisfied?" They reply: "We are satisfied." He then asks: "What is to be done with the food that remains?" They reply: "It may be eaten in the company of your friends and relatives."

The *Piṇḍapradāna* is the offering of lumps of rice to the deceased. After the Brāhmins' meal, the son of the deceased sprinkles water and blades of darbha grass, saying: "May the fathers, the grandfathers and the great grandfathers wash themselves." Then, offering the lumps of rice, he says: "This food is for you, my father."—"O fathers, regale yourselves here, come as bulls each to his share." *Piṇḍas* (rice-balls) are then smeared with ghee, collyrium and oil, and dressed with a tuft of wool, so as to represent the ancestors. Worship is given to them in the form of water to wash and to sip, incense, flowers and *pāyasa* (rice cooked in milk). The prayers which accompany those rites are concluded as follows: "O Fathers, go away by the sombre ancient paths, after bestowing on us wealth, and endow us here with auspicious prosperity and valiant sons." Invocations are made for all the deceased members of the family and for the prosperity of all living members. The Brāhmins are accompanied to the door and the ceremony ends with this mantra: "If the ancestors are in the world of gods, they are gratified by the food offered in fire; if they are in the world of ancestors, they are gratified by the dinner given to the Brāhmins; if they are in hell they are gratified by the *piṇḍas* offered on the ground."

Conclusion

Hindus have not developed a theology of the saṃskāras because the Upaniṣads have diverted reflection into another direction, that of the quest for *mokṣa* and *Brahman*. This is an individual quest, whereas saṃskāras are concerned with hallowing the whole community for the sacrifices which secure the social and cosmic order. The two trends have not been integrated. Due to this, the saṃskāras are no longer well understood and often have become a mere matter of social respectability.

Those Christians who understand and receive with faith the sacraments instituted by Jesus know also their prefigurations in the Old Testament. The Brāhmanic saṃskāras were not so clearly monotheistic as the Abrahamic circumcision or the baptism of John. Nevertheless, they were and still are hallowing rites perfecting men and women for rites obscurely focused on the saving God and on a rebirth which prefigures that of the baptised in Christ.

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Chapter 16

Image Worship

(P. Fallon)

In his epic drama, *The Satin Slipper*, the great Christian poet, Paul Claudel, imagines the following conversation between the heroine, Dona Prouheze, and her Guardian Angel:

> G.A.—"Even sin! Sin also serves."
> D.P.—"So it was good that he loved me?"
> G.A.—"It was good that you taught him longing."
> D.P.—"Longing for an illusion? For a shadow that evermore escapes him?"
> G.A.—"Desire is for what is, illusion is what is not. Desire, through and by illusion, is of what is, by and through what is not."

In Biblical terms, an *idol* is an empty vanity, an illusion; *idolatry* is a most heinous sin. For the Hebrew People it meant adultery, abandoning Yahweh to run after strange gods. When thinking of Hindu image-worship *(pratīkopāsanā)*, both the severe condemnations of the Bible and the words of the Christian poet ① come naturally to our mind: idolatry is evil and, objectively, sinful; yet we know how much 'longing' for the God Incarnate there can be in the midst of this desire to see, to touch and personally, concretely, to approach the Invisible, Intangible and Transcendent Deity. In India especially, the most ardent and sublime devotion *(bhakti)* has generally been intimately associated with the worship of 'idols'.

A. Origin and Development of Hindu Image-Worship

In the strictly Vedic forms of worship, such as *yajña*, there is no room for the image of any god; there seems to have been no Vedic icon. Yet image-worship in India can be traced back to pre-Vedic times; the Indus Valley civilisation knew this type of worship. The veneration of aniconic symbols like sacred stones and trees is also of very ancient origin. But from the first century A.D., statues became widely popular under the influence of the statuary of the Greek kingdoms of the North-West. This trend began with the Buddhists for whom the Greek sculptors carved Apollo-like statues of the Buddha. Soon Hindu workshops of sculpture competed with them and developed their own style of statues of the Buddha and of the Hindu deities as well. (The *Bhagavad-Gītā* had commended bhakti and the simple offering called *pūjā*; these could more easily be 2. offered to a god if his statue could be enthroned as a guest of honour in the best room or in a shrine specially erected.) From the second century, kings and rich men began to rival one another in building large and beautiful temples. This transition from the Vedic and Brāhmanic *yajña without* images (aniconic) to iconic pūjā marks the mutation from Brāhmanism to Hinduism proper.

There have been at various times numerous reformers and mystics who denounced the worship of idols and the undue importance given to mythology: the great Maratha bhakta Nāmadeva, Kabīr, Nānak, Dādu, Rām Mohan Roy and the Brāhmos, Dayānanda and the Arya Samajists, Tagore, and many others condemned image-worship. In the 19th century there was a definite movement away from idolatry; but the influence of Vivekānanda and Rāmakrishṇa, of Tilak, of the Theosophical Society, of the Rāmakrishna Mission and many other revivalist groups, has brought about a resurgence of idolatry. Today, we see the ancient forms of temple and home worship continue among the masses of ordinary people whose simple ardent piety is too often exploited by uneducated and venal priests. Among the more educated and urbanised sections of the population, the same image-worship, often less religious, re-interpreted according to modernistic views, tends to become for many a social or cultural phenomenon rather than a deeply devotional one. Hindu image-worship and, in a wider sense, Hindu idolatry remains an extremely complex and varied thing: animistic survivals and age-long superstitions, highly rationalised and elaborate rituals, meditation techniques, luxuriant symbolism and mythological pantheons of inexhaustible richness, an undercurrent of pantheism and an explicit acknowldgement of the Divine Transcendence, a devotion searching for personal contact with the Supreme 'He' and a philosophy which reduces all to an impersonal and gnostic 'It'. This confused complexity of the Hindu image-world is explained by a modern Bengali author:

"The Hindu is fundamentally an agnostic, i.e., has never believed in the possibility of human intelligence ever to unravel the mysterious eternal truths of the universe, or to understand, except negatively, the nature and attributes of God; and therefore he has ever felt to be at complete liberty to *imagine* and invent whatsoever God or Gods he chooses to adore. He has not feared to conceive the Divinity as He, She, It or They. He has worshipped his Deity as father, mother, brother, sister, sweet-heart, lover, friend, and what not; and has endowed his own creation or invention with any attributes he likes for the time being. He had borrowed his god-lore from the Mongols, he has taken his god-lore from the hill-tribes, he has imbibed his god-lore from the speechless message of sunshine and snows, and he has evolved his god-lore out of his own head and heart. His polytheism or henotheism is based essentially on his agnosticism."

B. Consecration of the Idol

Generally speaking, there is no *pūjā* without previous *prāṇa pratiṣthā.* This consecration may be done once for all as in the case of images continuously worshipped in temples or home shrines; it may be for the short period of some occasional worship. But an image which has not been duly 'enlivened' cannot be worshipped and this animation ceremony must be repeated, if the image is in any way desecrated or if it does not receive worship for a long period of time. The mantras which must be used for this consecration are found in all the Hindu rituals; varying in length and solemnity, they consist in an invocation to the particular god or goddess whose image is being consecrated, the deity being asked to come and indwell the idol, each limb of the statue being touched by the consecrating priest and made to become a limb of the deity.

Tvām aham..mūrtau..āvāhayāmi, Bhagavān Śiva iha āgaccha..
(I invoke thee, calling thee to come into this image; come, Lord Śiva...)
Asya Śri-Śivasya prāṇā iha prāṇāḥ, Vāg-Manaś-cakṣuḥ-śrotra ghraṇa..
(Let the life-souls of Śiva animate this, let his five senses be here..)
Tvām sarvagam.. Śiva iha tiṣṭha...pratiṣṭhito bhava-iti prasīda..
(Omnipresent Śiva, dwell here..Graciously be staying here..)

Those who have assisted at this consecration ceremony will have noticed the change in the attitude of the worshippers once the priest has finished the rite. The image was quite evidently clay, stone or metal; it had been bought and brought without much show of respect. As soon as the consecrating rite is over, adoration begins; the devout worshipper believes that something has happened, the statue or image has been transformed into the very body of the god or, at least, into his abode. In fact, many of the words designating the idol make this quite clear: the arca is also called *vigraha, vera, vapuḥ, tanū, rūpa* (most of these words mean 'the body' of the god); the words *pratimā* and *pratikṛti* are often used and emphasise rather the 'likeness'. In Bengal, the most common designation of the idol is the word *ṭhakur* which really means 'the Lord'. For no Hindu is God an inanimate statue or thing. For most Hindus, the consecrated image becomes the very body of the deity.

Once consecrated, the idol becomes the centre of an elaborate ritual; it is treated as a most revered guest. The complete *pūjā* comprises sixteen gifts *(soḍaśopacāra): āsana* (seating), *svāgata* (welcome), *pādya* (washing of feet), *arghya* (offering of rice, durba grass, flowers and sandal-paste), *ācamanīya* (rinsing) and *snāniya* (bathing), *vasana* (garment) and *bhūṣaṇa* (ornaments), *gandha* (perfume), *puṣpa* (flower), *dhūpa* (incense), *madhuparka* (gifts), *tāmbula* (areca nut) and finally *tarpaṇa* (libation) and *nati* (deep bow). In the evening lamps are waved; conchshells are blown several times a day. All this lasts as long as the deity dwells in the image. In the temple, in many homes, the main image is thus worshipped daily; in the case of occasional feasts, especially when idols are enthroned in public places for *sarvajanī* (public) ceremonies, the deity is asked to remain only for one, two or three days. Then a new rite, the *visarjana* (relinquishing) takes place: the god or goddess is thanked for having dwelled among the worshippers and asked to depart till the following festival. After this rite, the image, because it has been the abode or body of the deity, is respectfully taken to some sacred river and thrown in the water.

We may notice that the consecration of the image is a ceremony previous to, and distinct from, the offering itself. Besides, it is a human rite in this sense that it consists partly in a prayer to the deity to manifest itself in the idol and partly in the recitation of magic formulas taught by the Tantra literature. The priest clearly acts here on behalf of the worshipper, not apparently as God's representative.

(This consecration has some features in common, phenomenologically, with the Eucharistic Consecration of the sacred species. But there is no question here of 'transubstantiation': the image becomes the body of the god or goddess in the sense that it is now inhabited by the deity as the human body, in the Hindu view, is inhabited by the spirit of man. The relation remains rather extrinsic;

for a Hindu, the body does not really belong to the person of the individual. Besides, the deity, even though imagined or conceived in an anthropomorphic manner, is generally supposed to be pure spirit and no matter could be 'transubstantiated' into spirit.

Though there is evidence that most Hindu worshippers believe that, after the consecration ceremony, there is a real *sāṃnidhya* (presence) or self-manifestation *(āvirbhāva)* of the deity in the image, there remains something subjective in their attitude towards the idol. The mythology which gives its meaning to the idol and the symbolism expressed in the idol itself represent, more or less consciously, the outward projection of an inner urge rather than the surrender to a given and revealed fact. Finally, what is the reality of the material object which is worshipped? What is the reality of the particular god or goddess thus invoked? What is the distinction between this deity and any other deity? What is the reality of the very personality attributed to the gods? Against the background of pantheistic immanentism peculiar to most Hindu thought (or, as was said above, in the context of the peculiar agnosticism which characterises Hindu thought), this subjectivity always qualifies Hindu attitudes and beliefs; a certain levity, some sort of "as if" make-believe appears in the very midst of the sincerest devotion.

C. Variety of Hindu Idols

Hindu Scriptures distinguish at least 8 kinds of images according to the material selected: stone, wood, metal, sandalwood, a picture drawn on canvas or even paper, sand, precious stones and—this last category is very important—*'mental image'*. In fact, it is often repeated that, the main purpose of image-worship being to help the worshipper's meditation and concentration, a mental image, for those who know how to meditate, is as good as a material one. Other rituals classify the images thus: gold, silver, copper, diamond, stone, sacred or sacrificial wood, iron, conch-shell, brass, etc. All agree that a water vessel duly daubed with vermilion and sandal-paste or an ordinary cloth or paper picture encased in a wooden frame can take the place of the statue (in this case the pūjā is called *ghaṭapūjā* or *paṭa-pūjā)*.

In all pūjās the image, either materially or mentally, must be fashioned according to strict rules. Each deity, even each aspect of any particular deity, has its *dhyāna-mantra* (meditation formula) fixed by tradition and recorded in the numerous *sādhanamālās* (collections of worshipping 'schemes'): this mantra gives the precise description of the image with the exact posture, expression, colour, support, etc. Most dhyānamantras have come down from Buddhist times (the Buddhist *'dhāranī'* was a short formula conducive to *'dhāraṇā'*, i.e., concentration) or have been borrowed from the Purāṇas. There is a very complicated symbolism behind this image-making, and traditional images are rarely realistic or even truly anthropomorphic: ten arms or three heads, a garland of skulls, an elephant-headed body are not meant to be 'representative' art! As in Indian classical dance (in fact, the connection is very close between Hindu dance and Hindu sculpture), each *mudra* (position of the fingers) has a symbolic value: Hindu idolatry is essentially and primarily a 'mental dramaturgy'; the symbolic meaning of the gestures of the worshipper and of the postures of the idol is intended to foster a sort of 'interiorised liturgy', through which the devotee indentifies himself mentally with the object of his adoration, loses himself in the object to realise his true and divine nature. Yoga has influenced and moulded Hindu image-worship to a considerable extent; image-worship is a first step towards the self-discovery which is the aim of all yoga.

The majority of Hindu worshippers, however, adore clay or stone images, not mental pictures. Many objects of worship are aniconic: Śiva is most commonly worshipped in the shape of a stone from the Narmadā, the *Vāṇa-liṅga*, or in the shape of the traditional liṅga. Viṣṇu is worshipped in the shape of a black stone found in the Gaṇḍaki river, called Śālagrāma (or in the shape of the Tulasi plant); Durgā is adored in the shape of a metallic stone, the Sun in that of a crystal, Gaṇeśa, in the form of a red stone. Many of these idols are in no need of consecration, they are supposed to be self-consecrated, focal points of the divine power diffused all through nature.

Diagrams *(yantras)*, i.e., complicated geometrical designs as found in the Tantras, are frequently used instead of more concrete images.

In connection with the idols, the question of the *vāhana* (vehicle), i.e., the animal generally represented as supporting or carrying the god or goddess, is of particular interest. The goddess Sitalā rides an ass, Śaṣṭhī a cat; Manasā is never without her snake. Śiva and his bull, Durgā and her lion, Kārtik and his peacock, Gaṇeśa and his mouse, Lakṣmī and the owl, Sarasvatī and the swan, Agni and the goat, Nārāyaṇa and the garuḍabird; each deity has a special animal-companion, emblem or support. Some scholars think that, at some earlier stage, India may have had theriomorphic idols rather than anthropomorphic ones; gradually, the animal passed to the second and inferior rank and the deity was humanised.

D. Idols and Daily Life

What is the role played by idols in the daily religious life of the Hindus? First, it must be said that no one idol is necessarily worshipped by all Hindus; there are not a few Hindus who completely do away with all *sākāra upāsanā,* i.e., they worship God under no concrete form. Others are at liberty to choose this or that particular shape, image or statue. This is often a matter of caste or family tradition; it may also follow upon the *dīkṣā* (initiation) of the individual devotee.

In many homes, there is a place especially reserved for the pictures or statues revered by the family. Every morning, flowers are offered and, often, more elaborate rituals are gone through by at least some members of the family or by the priest in the service of the family. Beside the main deity of the family one can find many other 'holy pictures' and 'sacred objects'; all receive some worship or reverence.

There are innumerable shrines and temples where particular deities are worshipped. One hears of images more *jāgrat* (lit. wakeful) than others; many are 'miraculous images' to which various prodigies are ascribed. Special powers are attributed to particular deities and their images; offerings are made to them to obtain boons and favours. Many people seem to be rather un-selective and prefer to placate or invoke all available deities and images rather than to choose one *iṣṭādevatā* (preferred deity). Practically, polytheism and superstition are often mixed with true bhakti.

Many idols are images of gods and goddesses of the official Hindu pantheon; among the lower castes and tribes, many deities are rather 'godlings' or even 'spirits' than full-fledged devatās. There are many images of the various avatāras, especially of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma with their divine consorts. Some holy men, divinised in various degrees, are also worshipped; Rāmakrishna, for instance, has his image in thousands of Bengali homes. The pūjā ritual seems, in practice, to be somewhat 'polyvalent' in meaning: it can signify, and often does signify, full adoration, and then the idol is the object of pūjā only, because it has become the body and receptacle of the deity. But it appears that pūjā can also signify reverence of a lesser intensity, in fact all the grades of respect and veneration. Everything can then in some way become object of pūjā: relics, sacred books, sacred animals, persons entitled to special honour like the guru, the husband, the departed ancestors, etc. Holy mountains, places, rivers, some forces of nature, anything that inspires 'awe' and is surrounded with an aura of mystery or sacredness (even a monster because it appears preternatural) can become an object of worship. There is no strict boundary line between the Divine and the finite.

In fact, the Hindu theologians explain this by distinguishing the divine presence by which God is immanent in all beings (*sarvādhiṣṭhāna*) and the special presence (*viśeṣādhiṣṭhāna*) by which He is as it were localised, focalised in the object chosen for worship. The general presence is compared to the presence of the fire in wood (*dāru-vahni-vat*) (according to the old cosmologies, the fire was immanent in the wood and would manifest itself when the wood was rubbed): the particular presence is compared to that of the fire in a lump of iron, the fire penetrating wholly and transforming the black and cold iron into a brilliant and burning, though unconsumed, mass (*ayaḥ-piṇḍāgni-vat*).

E. The Meaning of Idols for Hindus

The Hindu has a deep sense of the Sacred. This divine and sacred Power or Essence, this great 'It' is diffused throughout nature; every person and every thing is penetrated by this 'It' which constitutes the deepest Reality (Brahman or Ātman) of all. Any object or person can be singled out and, through a process of ritual and mental purification, can become the Deity 'in focus'. Ritual ceremony and mental meditation only make manifest (*āvirbhūta*) what was latent (*avyakta*); they concentrate the attention on the Sacredness and Divinity of the universe. In their daily lives, Hindus are constantly brought back to that sense of mystery and immanent divinity by all the symbols and images they worship. For one who does not know the personal and inner Life of God as revealed in Christ, this effort to reach beyond and above sense-reality by means of a thousand signs and idols, this constantly re-awakened consciousness of the sacredness of things and persons, may represent an admirable search and yearning after God. But, due to human weakness and sin, this movement towards God has been vitiated: idolatry is a search for God and, at the same time, a turning away from Him; a prayer and a refusal, adoration and sacrilege. The symbols are too often unworthy because only man-made; the very multiplicity of these symbols breaks up the divine Oneness. Many cling to the idol and do not reach the personal but transcendent God. The one-sided realisation of immanence and a too great familiarity with the Divine often blur and dim the true sense of adoration in complete surrender and sacrifice. Yet, in the daily life of many, the images, sincerely and devoutly worshipped, are at least occasions of genuine and humble prayer. Objective error and objective sin do not mean subjective perversion or guilt.

Conclusion

First, there should be no contempt in our attitude: idol-worship is not indicative of a lower degree of intelligence or civilisation. The most highly civilized nations, outside Christianity, have practised it; the Greeks and the Romans were not less intelligent or cultured than the Jews!

A Christian, especially a Catholic, should understand the ardent desire which traverses all idolatry: men cannot rest satisfied with a distant Deity. The 'sacramentalism' which characterises true Christianity should help us to see what there is of positive value in the 'symbolism' of the Hindu religious world.

Yet, no compromise is possible for us with idolatry. Many idolaters *are* sincere and ardently religious; idolatry itself remains an error, objectively a great sin.

What is the essential difference between Catholic "image-worship" and Hindu idolatry? It has been shown already that the *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* ceremony is an essential prerequisite of any orthodox Hindu pūjā; no Christian statue or image is subjected to such a ceremony. A blessing, yes; a 'consecration', never. If there is anything similar, at least apparently, to the Hindu *pratiṣṭhā* in our religion, it is the eucharistic rite of consecration. This, for us, is not a preparation for a subsequent sacrifice, a human effort or prayer to bring the Deity near to the worshipper; it is a divine act, Christ Himself being the priest and man His instrument. The consecration is the sacrifice, and the sacrifice is Christ's sacrifice. Besides, the Christian consecration calls for a surrender in Faith to the Mystery, and it does not purpose to give our eyes, ears and senses an object for them to contemplate.

Christians never worship any image or statue of the Deity. It is generally agreed that, within certain limits and with the approval of the Church, some symbols and even images or statues of God (the Holy Trinity, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, God's wisdom, etc.) may be designed and placed in churches for the sake of instruction and edification. But never has an image of the Deity been the object of worship. If we say that Christ's image is worshipped, we do not mean that Christ is present in the image, but that we worship Christ who is represented by the image. We could not imagine a "consecrated" crucifix; our attitude to the images of Christ is quite distinct from that towards the sacred Host. Other images and statues are not given divine honour but reverence; in no case, is there a belief in the presence of the person revered in the image to which honour is given

Can we speak of idolatry in connection with the Hindu image-worship? Is it not clear that the Hindu devotee keeps the sense of the divine transcendence and consequently cannot be said to pay divine honour to what is not God Himself? I do not think that any idolater, except an unintelligent and superstitious savage, has ever thought that God was just 'stock-and-stone'; the Israelites did not believe that God was just a golden calf! But to worship a man-made image, to attempt to localise the Deity, to personify any one particular aspect of the Deity and break up the divine Oneness, this leads to a dangerous humanisation of the Transcendent God. Idolatry does not imply the belief that God is a mere statue or finite being, but the quite different assumption that a statue can be made to become God or God's abode and body, that a finite person or symbol can be an adequate object of adoration.

For a *moral valuation* of image-worship we may consider the following points:

—When image-worship degenerates into magic, or into an attempt to placate finite beings (ghosts, demons, etc.), it is evidently sinful. Image-worship, though in itself distinct from these aberrations or degradations, easily leads to these sinful abuses. Even Christians have constantly to be warned against superstition.

A. The Beginnings of Yoga

The early traces of Yoga lead us back into Vedic times. In the age of brāhmanic sacrifices all endeavours for human prosperity and final emancipation were connected with the performance of ritual sacrifices. Yet, in spite of the great significance attached to exterior rituals, a keen sense of the importance of man's personal endeavour was developed. In deeper speculative reflections, the sacrificial fire was considered as but the visible symbol of the inner fire by which man himself becomes a living sacrifice. "Having kindled it (the sacrificial fire) he makes it blaze, thinking, herein I will perform the sacred work. Thereby he makes blaze that fire which has been established in his innermost soul." (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2, 2, 2, 16). Man has to discover and develop the forces which are hidden in himself, if he wishes to attain the highest goal.

The concrete aim of this inner effort is, in early times, linked up with the concept of *tapas*, which means heat, and is used for any form of austerity. In some of the old cosmogonies we read that Prajāpati, the supreme God of the *Brāhmaṇas*, produces the world through "*tapas*", i.e., the concentrated force of his creative powers. Analogically, man also is to attain creative powers through *tapas*. This comprises many forms of afflictions: exposing oneself to heat, fasting, abstinence from marriage. The life of the ascetic is described at length in the 6th Book of *Manusmṛti*:

> Having collected food according to his ability, he may either eat at night (only) or in the daytime (only), or at every fourth mealtime, or at every eighth. Or he may constantly subsist on flowers, roots and fruit alone which have been ripened by time and have fallen spontaneously... Let him either roll about on the ground, or stand during the day on tiptoe, or let him alternately stand and sit down... In summer let him expose himself to the heat of five fires, during the rainy season live under the open sky, and in winter be dressed in wet clothes, gradually increasing his austerities... Making no effort for things that give pleasure, chaste, sleeping on the bare ground, not caring for any shelter.. Let him wander about absolutely silent... let him always wander alone, without any companion in order to attain final liberation...

Tradition has ascribed wonderful effects to *tapas*. It conquers the world; ascetics become more powerful than gods; gods themselves practise it for hundreds and thousands of years in order to gain superiority; among all gods Śiva excels in *tapas*, living in the icy solitude of the Himalayas.

Tapas becomes a form of magic by which one may acquire any good. As a means of man's emancipation, it stands in contrast to the Christian idea of penance which expresses man's submission under God. However, neither in theory nor in practice is *tapas* confined to magical purposes. It is the merit of Yoga to have directed the practices of austerity and self-discipline to spiritual ends. Yoga became one of the great ways of attaining *mokṣa*, i.e., final liberation. Its philosophy and its practical application are described in Patañjali's *Sūtras*.

B. Patañjali's System

The *philosophical foundations* are, to a great extent, taken over from the Sāṃkhya system: each man comprises in himself two essentially different spheres of reality: there is first the *puruṣa*, the individual and spiritual self. He is pure consciousness; without subject-object relation; without any change; outside any causal connection; this consciousness is totally self-luminous.

The puruṣa is associated with *prakṛti*, the principle of empirical reality. It comprises the objective world, outside man, as well as the inner sphere of human experience and activity. This inner sphere is constituted by the functioning of the senses *(indriyas)* which are synthesised by *manas* (approximately, 'mind'), the principle of sensitive perception and reaction; the empirical self is constituted by *ahaṃkara* (ego-sense), the principle of individualisation; finally, the principle of discrimination, of judging and deciding, is *buddhi* (approximately, 'intellect'). All these principles together form man's subtle body. They vary in their concrete composition from man to man. They could, by themselves, remain unconscious, were they not illumined through the light of the puruṣa who reflects himself in the functions and modifications of this subtle body. It follows that the puruṣa experiences himself as having different qualities in different people on account of the difference of their subtle body in which he reflects himself, though the puruṣa is really without any quality. Similarly the puruṣa, though totally inactive, experiences himself as active and as suffering because his consciousness is reflected in the ever changing empirical body with which he is associated. The reflected, and therefore empirical and ever changing, consciousness is called *citta*. Each puruṣa must be freed from his association with the empirical body and thus be allowed to shine in his own, unchanging and pure consciousness.

Yoga is the organised effort of this self-deliverance. Citta, the changing stream of conscious acts, must be stopped. So Yoga is defined in the beginning (1,2): "the restraint of conscious modifications" (*cittavṛtti nirodhaḥ*). The following sūtra adds the purpose of Yoga: "Then the seer stands in his own nature." This means that after the flow of modifications has come to an end, the puruṣa shines in his own light, in changeless, objectless consciousness.

The *process of yoga* is described in the second book of the aphorisms. First, the three spheres in which the training has to be carried out are indicated (2, 1): "Yoga of work *(kriyāyoga)* consists in austerity *(tapas)*, study *(adhyāsa)* and devotion to God *(prāṇidhāna)*." The three terms express the bodily, mental, and ethico-religious realms in which the training takes place.

In the following sūtra, we learn of the double purpose of the training (2,2): "To bring about *samādhi*, i.e., concentration *(samādhi-bhāvanārtha)* and to diminish affliction *(kleśatanūkaraṇārtha)*." Affliction is described (2, 3) as nescience *(avidyā)*, egoism *(asmitā)*, attachment *(rāga)*, aversion *(dveśa)*, clinging to life *(abhiniveśa)*. Affliction is considered the consequence of man's ordinary life, in which he follows the spontaneous impulsions of attractions and aversions centred in his empirical self, which clings to the instinct of preserving his life. This is the sphere of ignorance, of the illusory reflection of his consciousness in the stream of mental impressions and actions. Ignorance is therefore the root of all afflictions. It is described (2, 5) as "taking the non-eternal, the impure, the painful, the non-self as eternal, pure, pleasurable, self." Ignorance is not a mere intellectual error, but the radical misjudgment of the world in accepting the changing being as the ultimate reality.

So man has to struggle to free himself from ignorance and its results. The process of training comprises the eight "limbs" *(aṅgas)* of Yoga (2, 29): Restraint *(yama)*, observance *(niyama)*, posture *(āsana)*, regulation of breath *(prāṇāyama)*, withdrawing of the senses *(pratyāhāra)*, concentration *(dhāraṇā)*, meditation *(dhyāna)*, trance *(samādhi)*. They fall into three groups: the first two express the inner attitude, then follow three bodily exercises, and finally the three stages of meditation.

The *inner attitude* of restraint *(yama)* is specified (2,30) as abstaining from violence *(ahiṃsā)*, truthfulness *(satya)*, abstaining from theft *(asteyā)*, continence *(brahmacārya)*, abstaining from covetousness *(aparigraha)*. These attitudes are binding on any Yogin (2, 31): "These are the great vows, not limited by caste, place, time, circumstances." In fact, they form the basic catalogue of virtues expected in any Hindu saint. They are complemented by the *niyamas* (2, 32): Cleanliness *(śauca)*, contentment *(santoṣa)*, austerity and purificatory action *(tapas)*, study *(svādyāya)*, devotedness to God *(Īśvarapraṇidhāna)*.

Among bodily *exercises*, posture *(āsana)* holds the first place. It is meant to be both firm and pleasant *(sthirasukham)*. Specifications of the various postures are given by the commentators. The purpose of such injunctions is to secure the best possible bodily disposition for the process of meditation. Calmness, equally distant from drowsiness and forceful efforts, is required for mental concentration.

Then follows the control of breath, "the controlling of inhalation and exhalation" (2, 49). The practice begins with very simple devices of deep and slow breathing, i.e., "stopping the right nostril with the thumb, through the left nostril fill in air, according to capacity; then, without any interval, throw the air out through the right nostril, closing the left one. Again inhaling through the right nostril, eject through the left, according to capacity; practising this three or five times at four hours of the day, before dawn, during midday, in the evening, and at midnight, in fifteen days or a month purity of the nerves is attained" (Vivekananda, *Rāja-Yoga*, 21s). It leads, however, to complicated practices which cannot be undertaken without guidance.

The direct influence of deep and smooth breathing on the mental attitude is easy to trace by anyone. The particular stress of Yoga on the control of breath is connected also with the idea of breath as the manifestation of individual vitality. Accelerated breath means intensified vitality, e.g., in a state of excitement; retarded breath means the slowing down of individual vitality and the approach to pure consciousness. So we may understand the strange practice of some Hindu ascetics who allow themselves to be walled up at the end of their life. The closed tomb where their breathing comes to an end is called their samādhi.

Intimately connected with the control of breath is the control of the senses (2, 54), "by which the senses do not come into contact with their objects and follow, as it were, the nature of the mind." Whereas in daily life the senses take the lead and dissipate man's mind into the outside world, in Yoga the lead goes to the mind: "The bees fly as the queen flies, and sit down as the queen sits down; so the senses become restrained, as the mind is restrained" (Vyāsa's commentary on 2, 54).

In the *three stages of meditation* the first step is *dhāraṇā*, concentration. It consists in fixing the mind on one object. The purpose of this exercise is mental control. Therefore, in the classical Yoga the object of the meditation is of little consequence. Vyāsa says: "Concentration means the mind becoming fast on such places as the sphere of the navel, the lotus of the heart, the light of the brain, the tip of the nose, the tip of the tongue and such like parts of the body." However, already in Vācaspati's interpretation, and especially in later religious groups, the Lord *(Īśvara)* becomes the main object of meditation.

The second step is *dhyāna*, meditation in the stricter sense. It is defined (3,2) as the continuity of the mental activity. The mind is concerned with its object, and consequently is still tainted with illusion. But the continuity of the mental effort marks a degree of self-control in which the mind is "no longer influenced by any other effort" (Vyāsa).

Dhyāna is the direct preparation for *samādhi*, trance, the final stage of meditation, where all mental activity is stopped, and the consciousness rests in itself: "When alone the object of contemplation remains shining *(arthamātranirbhāsam)*, and one's own form is emptied *(svarūpaśūnyam)*, this is samādhi" (3, 3). Ascending from mental activities, man reaches a state where he touches the absolute, while the subjective consciousness still persists, either as consciousness of the subject, or of the object, or of the process of knowing. Such samādhi is called *savikalpa*, i.e., objectbound, or also *sabīja* (1, 46), i.e., seed-containing, because it still contains the seed of the changing world and of mental activity. Even this last trace of empirical elements disappears in the highest state of consciousness in *nirbīja samādhi*, the seedless trance. The process of elimination has come to an end. This state is described in the last sūtra of Book one (1, 51): "When this too is eliminated (namely, the sublimating activity of the mind), all being eliminated, the seedless samādhi follows."

C. Evaluation of Yoga

When attempting a valuation of Yoga, we may start with a comparison with the Sāṃkhya system. Patañjali takes most of the intellectual equipment of his system from the dualistic Sāṃkhya with its two basic principles, viz., *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Still, the approach is very dissimilar. N.K.Brahma points to the following differences *(Philosophy of Hindu Sādhanā*, p. 127): "The Sāṃkhya follows the intellectual method and seeks to attain the required discrimination through reason directly. But the Yoga system prescribes a different method of attaining the necessary discrimination. It is primarily a *voluntaristic system* that hopes to develop reason through the education and exercise of the will. The discrimination comes as a result of samādhi where the will is perfectly fixed and absolutely controlled. The Yoga thus begins with the regulation of the will and prescribes regulated conduct *(yama* and *niyama)* at the very beginning of the course of spiritual discipline. Reason cannot establish its supremacy over an unruly and uncontrolled will. The perfected will becomes identified with reason, and when the modifications of *citta* cease, the pure self manifests itself in its native splendour and glory." In Yoga, philosophy is subordinated to practice. There is hardly a system of mental training more elaborate, more realistic, more comprehensive than Yoga. It takes into account the entire structure of man, his psychophysical unity, the influence of the mind on the body, but also of the body on the mind, and the stress of the system lies on the latter. Man reaches his last end not by thinking of the absolute, but by patiently building up his system of control with a clear view of the purpose. N.K. Brahma tells us (*l.c.,* 128): "While the Sāṃkhya seeks to control the lower by means of the higher, the sense organs by the mind, the mind by means of the buddhi and so on. the Yoga proceeds from the opposite direction and hopes to get hold of the higher with the help of the lower. Here the mind is thought to be controlled through the regulation of breath and the posture of the body."

We have, secondly, to consider, the *goal of the training*. In this respect Yoga is disappointing, or rather it is essentially incomplete. Yoga tells us that man's highest aim is the *isolation* of the spiritual element in man. The puruṣa shines in his own light, free from the disturbance of the world, free mainly of the restless psychic processes in man himself. But there is no positive content in this freedom. We cannot conceive the real destiny of man, and particularly of his spiritual nature as a splendid isolation. It must consist in commitment and devotedness. The yogin withdraws from the world into his own sphere, he is no longer concerned with what happens around him. Even such virtues as ahiṃsā are seen primarily not as a benefit for others, but as a disposition for self-deliverance, because the yogin knows that violence does more harm to the one who inflicts it than to the one who suffers.

The Yogin is also separated from *God*. True, the classical Yoga knows of the existence of God as the supreme Lord — this is one of its distinctive marks against the atheistic Sāṃkhya system; Yoga actually recommends devotedness to God as one of the means of spiritual advance. But the yogin does not think of God as the creator and last end of man, in whose service and love man finds his fulfilment; he knows God only as the example of the pure consciousness. God is defined (1, 24) as "a distinct puruṣa, untouched by the hindrances of affliction, action and fruition." God represents the ideal of the yogin in his serene transcendence. Contemplation of God may serve as a means for self-perfection and as a training in renunciation. Vācaspati describes the devotion to God as "the doing of an action without thinking of the fruit to be obtained thereby" (on 2, 1). But God is a means only, and man remains the centre of his own interests and efforts.

Modern authors see in this neutrality the truly scientific character of Yoga: "Meditation of God, or of a person who has risen above worldly pleasures and pains, above all attractions and repulsions, or of any luminous body, or of any worldly object may equally serve the purpose. Here we find the truly scientific nature of the Yoga system. God and the worldly objects are placed on the same footing as means towards the attainment of concentration" (N.K. Brahma, *l.c.*, 133). Such an attitude cannot be called religious. But let us remember that Yoga is primarily a system of training which may be connected with a deeper philosophy, and with truly religious aspirations. This has been done in religious movements where God keeps the central place as object of meditation and service. Our study of *bhakti* will reveal those religious possibilities of Yoga.

We have also to answer the question whether the aims of Yoga can be obtained, i.e., whether man can truly reach, through his own efforts, superhuman powers and a state of pure consciousness. As to *extraordinary achievements* we have to be very careful in accepting facts. There are many possibilities of deception. However, it is certain that by systematic training man can achieve a higher degree of control over his psychic and physical faculties, and it will not be easy *a priori* to define the exact limits of such possibilities. Such achievements, are, in any case, only secondary, and should serve only as an index of the progress made in the spiritual training. Vivekananda says: "We must always remember that these (extraordinary achievements) are only the means. The aim, the end, the goal of all training is liberation of the soul. Absolute control of nature, and nothing short of it, must be the goal. We must be the masters, and not the slaves of nature" *(Rāja-Yoga*, 23).

But can man attain a state of *absolute* and objectless *consciousness*? We have first to eliminate any phenomenon of self-hypnosis which may be created by yogic practices. Further, we have clearly to distinguish the consciousness of the yogin from the vision of God, and also from strictly mystical knowledge. Mystic experience consists essentially in God's self-communication to man, whereas the yogin enters into a state of pure spiritual self-consciousness. There are psychologists who consider such a state possible. J. Marechal, S.J., describes the state of the yogin as follows: "The more or less complete ecstasy, which crowns the prolonged use of these means (of Yoga) consists in a silence of the soul freed from the phenomenal knowledge of the world and the self, and thus placed face to face with its own subsistent ground which is nothing else but the Universal Spirit."[1] This means that man truly may succeed in cutting through the layers of phenomenal experience, and touch the spiritual ground of his being. It does not imply any personal contact with God, but the awareness of spiritual existence as such, not reflected in a series of acts, but seen in itself. — What is the value of such an experience? J. Marechal agrees that it may have a deep, pacifying influence on the stream of psychic experience, but he thinks that it does not really enrich man. Man in his normal condition may be compared to one who dwells in a home with open windows through which he is in contact with the world. This is disturbing. He may replace the windows with mirrors, and the world, the stream of life, is excluded; he remains with himself. The mirrors give him the impression of lucidity and even infiniteness. All is shining in his own light. But is he richer, and is his life meaningful?

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[1] *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics,* 1st ed., p. 113

Modern interpretations tend to give Yoga a more positive outlook. S. Radhakrishnan describes it as leading towards the highest fulfilment of man's religious aspirations (*Indian Philosophy,* II, 373): "The Yoga discipline is nothing more than the purification of the body, mind, and soul and preparing them for the beatific vision. With faith and concentration, we can even rid ourselves of our ills. The normal limits of the human vision are not the limits of the universe. If we have faith in the soul, then the supernatural is also part of the natural." N. K. Brahma (*l.c.,* 136) concludes his notes on Yoga: "Regulation and control do not suppress but expand, and these are the only ways of expansion and development." Aurobindo calls his system "integral Yoga" as against the conception of Yoga as isolation. Such modern systems are rather a new development of Yoga than a mere interpretation.

D. Yoga and Christian Asceticism

What has Christianity to say about Yoga? Remarkable attempts have been made to integrate the psycho-physical technique of Yoga into the Christian way of perfection.[2] Such attempts are based on the correct assumption that a truly Christian life means the total consecration of man to God, and consequently demands the integration of all faculties of body and soul into God's service. Asceticism is not the suppression of the body, nor a merely negative struggle against inordinate passions, but the attempt to control the entire structure of our psycho-physical nature and to offer it to God's service. We must try to find the best possible disposition of a calmed body, of quiet nerves, of a balanced mind, of an atmosphere of silence, for our time of prayer and contemplation, and, in fact, for our whole life. Yoga with its rich experience and its studied technique may help much.

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[2] See, for instance, J.M. Dechanet, *Christian Yoga.*

However, we have to keep in mind the basic differences between Yoga and Christian perfection. The Christian lives a life of grace which is the gift of God. The supernatural life is not hidden in man's heart to be discovered and developed by the technique of Yoga. Many natural possibilities may be hidden in the depth of man and may be brought to light, but the life of personal union with God can be given by God alone. Only God can awaken man to the supernatural understanding of things divine, only He can stir man to the response of love by which man is able to offer himself to God. Man cannot produce grace; he can only, with the help of God, dispose himself to receive God's grace more deeply and in richer measure.

From this angle we may also understand why in Christianity no system parallel to Yoga has been generally recommended. We certainly get much practical guidance from spiritual writers, but they do not offer a system comparable to Yoga, though the *hesychasm* of the monks of Mount Athos approximates it. The system of Yoga has grown under the impulse of the conviction that man has to work out his own salvation by himself. The stress on the personal effort is greater, it is often exclusive, the need for a reliable and scientific system of these efforts was felt. The Christian outlook is primarily religious. Our salvation comes from God, and the Lord Himself prepares in us the ways of the Lord.

The Christian may learn much from the Yogin: his earnestness, perseverance, and systematic approach to his task. Yet Christian asceticism has its own features. Spiritual self-discipline among Christians will not develop into self-concentration but into greater readiness to hear God's word, to meditate on it, to be silent in His presence, to surrender to God a body and a mind which are only truly controlled and prepared to be spent in His service.

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Chapter 18

Jainism

(L. Pereira)

Jainism and Buddhism are two heterodox movements which arose in India during the 6th century B.C. The success of Buddhism is well known. It flourished in India for over 12 centuries. Yet it eventually disappeared from this land, and its recent revival by Dr Ambedkar is too political to justify including Buddhism in this account of religious India.

The case of Jainism is different. It never overwhelmed the country, but its hold on the small minority of Indians it had won to its teachings was never released except in Tamil Nadu. Today, they are more than three millions, most of them sincere and fervent believers. Although their doctrine is considered heretical by orthodox Hindus, their worship has taken forms which externally at least assimilate it to Hindu *pūjā*. A short account of Jainism is therefore not out of place in this book.

A. Origin and Development of Jainism

Jainism is closely associated with the name of Mahāvīra (Great Hero) whose life-span extended most probably from 540 B.C. to 468 B.C. (cfr. *L'Inde Classique*, no. 2438). Jains regard him as the twenty-fourth of a long line of Tīrthaṅkaras (ford-makers, guides) and as the Jina (spiritual conqueror) par excellence. Jainism is therefore the religion of those who aim at *conquering* the karma-rebirth cycle under the *guiding influence* of the lives and teaching of the Tīrthaṅkaras, as systematised by Mahāvīra Jina.

Mahāvīra was first a Kṣatrīya prince of North Bihar, called Vardhamāna. At about the age of thirty, he entered the existing religious group of Pārśvanātha, who is considered by Jains the twenty-third Tīrthaṅkara. As a wandering ascetic much given to meditation and austerities, Mahāvīra was gradually purified so that he reached illumination in about thirteen years. His preaching was not too successful at first, but later he won a huge following. At his death, probably at the age of seventy-two, his monks alone numbered fourteen thousand (or only 4,200, according to another source) apart from lay adherents and female ascetics.

Pārśvanātha's followers had of old accepted the idea that their monks should take four vows. To these four Mahāvīra added a fifth vow (of celibacy) and further held that his monks should possess nothing whatever — not even a loincloth. In this difference of opinion we possibly have the root of the later schism between the Digambara (space-clothed) and the Śvetāmbara (clothed in white). The latter came to be dominant in Jaina communities north of the Vindyas, the former in the southern districts.

Mahāvīra's community has remained a well-knit organisation comprising four *tīrthas* (orders): monks, nuns, laymen and lay women — called respectively muni (or sādhu), sādhvī, śrāvaka and śrāvikā. The monks and nuns are supported by the layfolk. High standards of asceticism are demanded of them. The layfolk on their part strive to approximate to the monastic ideal while fulfilling their domestic and professional obligations.

Jainism, unlike Buddhism, never spread beyond India's borders. Its early extension to Mysore is attributed to a twenty-year famine in Bihar which impelled a southern migration of Jains under Bhadrabāhu. A large body, however, remained in the north, where (perhaps in the early third century B.C.) the first canon of the Jaina scriptures was fixed by a Council at Pāṭaliputra under Sthūlabhadra. This canon restricted the authoritative texts to fourteen *Pūrvas* (subsequently lost) and eleven *Aṅgas.*

As in Buddhism the lapse of time led gradually to the veneration of images of Tīrthaṅkaras, historical and mythical.

The great schism which to our day separates the Digambaras from the Śvetāmbaras occurred around 80 A.D. The main point of difference is that the Digambaras hold that ascetics must be entirely nude. Nuns consequently exist only among the Śvetāmbaras. Connected with this is the Digambara contention that women cannot obtain mokṣa but need first to be reborn as men. Other Digambara views rejected by the opposing sect are: that images of the Tīrthaṅkaras must be represented with downcast eyes, nude and unadorned; that Mahāvīra never married; that a saint can sustain life swithout eating, once the highest stage of knowledge (kevala-Jñāna) is reached; and, that by the second century A.D., the entire canon of sacred books were lost.

This last point runs counter to the Śvetāmbara claim that some time around 475 A.D. a canon of sacred books was fixed and committed to writing by the Council of Valabhī (near Bhāvanagar). This list included the eleven Aṅgas of the Pāṭaliputra Council.

The 5th to 13th centuries mark the zenith of Jaina prosperity, especially in Western India. In the 12th century the versatile Śvetāmbara writer Hemacandra (1089-1173) is credited with winning over to Jainism king Kumārapāla, who made of Gujarat a Jaina model-state.

With the advent of the Muslims, the Jains lost their temporal power, never more to be regained. The only Muslim ruler who ever favoured the Jains through special edicts was Akbar, whom they even claim to have converted to Jainism.

Among the numerous sects the Loṅkā sect deserves to be mentioned. It sprang from the Śvetāmbaras in Gujarat around 1450 A.D. as a protest against the veneration paid to images in temples. Today it exists in a reformed version as the influential Sthānkāvasī sect, whose beginnings may be traced back to about 1650 A.D.

B. The Jaina System

1. *A Synthetic View*

For the Jains the whole universe (even minerals and fire) throbs with life. Hence the stress on ahiṁsā (non-killing), i.e., on the continuous effort one must make to avoid extinguishing life in any form. All lives are stages in a series of transmigrations, caused by *karma*. The higher forms of life are closer to complete liberation, which is finally achieved when the *jīva* (living) is rid of all its material *karma* particles. Various means may be employed: mental concentration (*yoga*), avoidance of evil deeds and desires, etc., but Jainism lays special stress on austerities. In this struggle for liberation man fights alone. There is no Supreme God. Man's heroes are the Tīrthaṅkaras. Following the path they have blazed, he will *by his own heroic efforts* escape from the karma-rebirth sequence, when his eternal jīva rises to that perfect state *(nirvāṇa)* in which it will enjoy the four infinities: infinite perception, knowledge, power and bliss, for ever and ever.

2. *Some Philosophical Tenets*

Although Jainism presents itself essentially as the authentic way towards *nirvāṇa*, it does this against the background of a philosophy. This philosophy is too complex to be summarised here, but we can state briefly some of those tenets which have implications for Jaina religious practice.

The universe is made of one living *(jīva)* and five non-living *(ajīva)* kinds of substances. They are all eternal and uncreated. Their admixture constitutes the world as we know it. To recover its natural infinitude a *jīva* must separate itself entirely from the *ajīva. Jīvas* are of various kinds according to the extent of their involvement in *ajīva* reality.

Karma is the link between *jīva* and *ajīva*. In the Jaina system, karma is made up of "extremely subtle matter which pours or infiltrates into the soul when wordly actions make as it were an opening into it" (H. Jacobi). Accumulated karma follows the soul after death through all its transmigrations. Should the *jīva* wish to escape, two tactics should be simultaneously employed. The first is to check the inflow of new *karma* (*saṁvara*). The second is to cause *karma* accumulated from the past to fall off (*nirjara*). This is achieved through mortifications. The karma is "burnt up in the glow of austerities."

Twelve types of such austerities *(tapas)* are usually recommended. Among these are various fasts (partial or even unto death); bodily discomforts of every sort; reverence towards superiors in knowledge, faith or character; and rigid control of the senses, speech and intellect. The confession of one's faults is binding on both ascetics and laymen as a valuable austerity. The ascetic confesses to the chief guru, and the laymen to whichever sādhu he chooses.

Finally, when completely purged of all its karmic burden "the soul takes the form of a straight line, goes in one moment, without touching anything and taking up no space (upwards to the highest ākāśa), and there develops into its natural form, obtains perfections, enlightenment, deliverance and final beatitude, and puts an end to all misery" (*Uttaradhyāna Sūtra*, 33, 73).

3. *The Fourteen GUNASTHĀNĀS (steps).*

The *jīva* ascends to that *nirvāṇa* by a ladder of fourteen steps or grades of increasing purification.

The *fifth* one is the highest step which the layman as such can reach. If he surmounts it he becomes a *sādhu*. When progressing within this fifth step, the layman passes through the *eleven pratimās* (stages). To the second of those *pratimās (vrata pratimā)* belongs the observance of the *twelve vows* of laymen, of which the first five resemble the five great vows of the monks.

In the *tenth* step the advanced ascetic "loses all sense of humour, all pleasure in beauty of sound or form, and all perception of pain, grief, fear, disgust or smells" (Stevenson, *The Heart of Jainism*, p.189).

A *jīva* on the *thirteenth* step is an omniscient *arhat*—"a perfect soul in human body, vibrating with the fast approaching glories of mokṣa." If, in addition, such a *jīva* preaches and forms a community, he is called a *Tīrthaṅkara*. But as soon as a *jīva* reaches the fourteenth step, he passes at once to *mokṣa* as a *Siddha,* and no further interest in struggling souls is then possible. Mahāvīra and the twenty-three preceding *Tīrthaṅkaras* are now *Siddhas*, but it is as *Tīrthaṅkaras* who guided others on the right path that the people love to speak and think of them.

4. *The Jaina Rules of Conduct*

Right conduct avoids karma-bondage *(bandha),* removes accumulated karma *(nirjara)* and checks the ingression of new karma particles *(saṁvara).*

(a) *The five great VRATAS (vows)*

The five vows of the ascetics are:

(1) *Ahiṃsā*: not to destroy life through carelessness.

(2) *Satya*: to speak only what is pleasant, wholesome and true.

(3) *Asteya*: to take nothing which is not given.

(4) *Brahmacārya*: to refrain from sexual intercourse.

(5) *Aparigraha*: to have no worldly possessions.

Each vow has a set of buttressing clauses *(bhāranā)* which indicate the necessary safeguards for its observance. Thus the *bhāranās* for the vow of truthfulness are: never to speak without deliberation, or when moved by anger, avarice or fear; also, never to tell a falsehood for fun or from the urge for quick repartee.

The chief vow is undoubtedly that of *ahiṃsā*. The monk must sweep insects off his path, and carefully inspect any food before he partakes of it. About the use of fire the *Sūtrakritānga Sūtra* says: "He who lights a fire kills living beings: he who extinguishes it, kills the fire. Therefore a wise man who considers well the Law should light no fire."

(b) *The three GUPTIS (restraints)*

The threefold restraint is exercised as follows:

(1) *Manogupti*: control of the mind by not indulging the emotions nor showing partiality of any sort.

(2) *Vacanagupti*: control of speech, e.g., by observing a vow of silence. If one must speak, a cloth *(mumatī)* should be held in front of the mouth to avoid injuring the "air-life".

(3) *Kāyagupti*: control of bodily movements.

(c) *The ten DHARMAS (pious duties)*

These ten duties bind the monk and in a lesser degree, the layman also:

(1) *Kṣamā*: control of anger and forgiveness of injuries.
(2) *Mārdava*: humility and suppression of arrogance.
(3) *Ārjava*: simplicity and frankness in speech and action.
(4) *Nirlobhatā*: absence of greed.
(5) *Tapas*: fasting and austerities (cf. *nirjara* above).
(6) *Saṃyama*: control of mind, body and speech (cf. the *guptis* above).
(7) *Satya*: truthfulness and meekness in speech.
(8) *Śauca*: thorough cleanliness.
(9) *Akiṃcinatra*: complete detachment from relatives, friends and property.
(10) *Brahmacārya*: celibacy.

C. Some Aspects of Jaina Worship

Since nothing is created, there exists no creating god. But since every *jīva* is by nature infinitely perfect, it is equivalently a god.

"A personal God has no place in Jainism: He is not needed...Jainism has a very definite and uncompromising attitude towards the conception of God. It is accused of being atheistic. This is not so, because Jainism believes in Godhood and in innumerable gods; but certainly Jainism is atheistic in not believing its gods to have created the Universe...Believers in the creation theory make God a man, bring him down to the level of need and imperfection; whereas Jainism raises man to Godhood and inspires him to reach as near Godhood as possible by steady faith, right perception, perfect knowledge, and, above all, a spotless life" (J. Jaini, pp.28 and 4-5).

The Jains, therefore, are offended by the term "atheist" because they claim to retain the idea of the divine in the sense of an exalted perfection which man can recover by his own efforts. "God is only the highest, the noblest and the fullest manifestation of all the powers which lie latent in the soul of man" (J. Jaini, p. XI).

Attention and respect are therefore focused not on a Supreme God (considered unnecessary), or on transmigrating "gods", but on those *jīvas* who have realised or are realising "godhood".

Hence, the most popular of Jaina invocations is the Māgadhī salutation which runs: "Reverence to the *Arahantas*; Reverence to the *Siddhas*; Reverence to the *Acāryas*; Reverence to the *Upādhyāyas*; Reverence to all *Sādhus* of the world". This is repeated with folded hands and bows to the four points of the compass.

When Jains say *"Aum"* (or "*Om*") the five latent sounds *a*, *a*, *ā*, *u* and *m* are said to stand respectively for *a*rhat, *a*ṣarīra (disembodied, hence "siddha"), *ā*cārya, *upādhyāya,* and *m*uni sādhu).

Mahāvīra left no instructions about temples and the veneration of images. These arose by a development parallel to that which occurred in Buddhism. The Jains began to use stūpas and then to adorn them with sculptures. In the first century B.C. we already find Jaina temples and somewhat later there is evidence of Tīrthaṅkara images in the temples. — Today the worship of those images is very close to the various forms of pūjā employed for the idols in Hindu temples.

Educated Jains say that such idol-worship is really "ideal-worship". Be that as it may, it is certain that Jainism is "a Church without priests" (Guérinot) and can logically assign only a secondary role to temples and images.

The most solemn of the religious festivals is the *Pajjusana* week which closes the Jaina year. There are special services and much fasting is indulged in. Laymen often take this opportunity of doing *poṣadha*, i.e., living for a time the life of a professed ascetic. Men and women gather at the monk's lodging *(apāsaro)* to make their confessions. All beg forgiveness of each other. The new year is thus begun in the joyous spirit of peace and kindliness.

Conclusion

If a creed may be judged by its ability to produce good citizens, Jainism is among the superior religions. What is more, its adherents seem to show great resistance to the modern craze for pleasure and luxury. Another of its merits is its belief in the distinctive individuality of each living being, even when liberated.

The Jaina conceptual approach could be disapproved for being primitive: animistic ideas abound, and *jīva* and *karma* are made too "material". But Jainism's main lack is common to all Indian systems: even when man is considered an individual, he is never seen to be a person. Now a person cannot become a plant or animal. Only a person has independence, freedom and responsibility; only a person has that deep spiritual centre which can enter into close communication with other personal centres *and emerge more itself.*

Where there are no persons, all ties become chains which fetter freedom, and, as a consequence, dreadful austerities must be performed to smash one's way to deliverance. But where there are persons, union in love becomes possible, for love can unite without enslaving; love is not a chain but a link which only heightens freedom. True Christian asceticism is based not on breaking chains but on forging links, and therefore the ascetical effort is directed against whatever makes union in selfless love weak, difficult or impossible.

But there is more. Religions which are blind to persons in time are also blind to a Personal God *beyond* and *above* time. With blindness goes deafness — the failure to hear the voice of Incarnate Love which has cut *into* time by raising human nature into union with Itself. In Christ Jesus, a race of redeemed persons is linked to the Tri-Personal Absolute. And when Christian saints choose *extremes* of asceticism, it is only to deepen their union with Crucified Love or to win such union for others.

In a word, the Jaina universe throbs with life but is dead to Love. Where there are no persons there is no love and no personal relationship with God. The Jaina is warmed by the words of the sacred *Ācārānga Sūtra* (I, 3:3): "Man! Thou art thy own friend; why wishest thou for a friend beyond thyself?" The Christian can only shiver.

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Chapter 19

The Rāmāyaṇa

(C. Bulcke)

A. Origin of the Rāma-story

a. The Rāma-Ballads. "Once upon a time there was a prince of the royal house of Ayodhyā and his name was Rāma. Due to the cunning of his step-mother, Rāma was banished for a time to the forests. He went into exile and his wife Sītā and his brother Lakṣmaṇa gladly went with him. While they were living in the forest an aboriginal chieftain kidnapped Sītā. Rāma rescued his faithful Sītā, but only after many adventures and only with the help of friendly aboriginal tribes. Then the time came for his exile to end and for him to return to his kingdom. He returned to Ayodhyā, was crowned and reigned for many years."

The bards *(sūtas)* of the court of Ayodhyā (Oudh, U.P.) soon made the adventures and heroism of Rāma the matter of their ballads. We find from allusions in the Buddhist Tipiṭaka (third century B.C.) and from the oldest portions of the Mahābhārata that these ballads were well-known by the fourth century B.C. It must have been at about this period that Vālmīki, the first of India's poets, her *ādikavi*, conceived the ambitious design of embodying the whole story of Rāma into one long poem which he called Rāmāyaṇa, or, the Wanderings of Rāma.

b. Historicity. What has been said above is not meant to imply that Vālmīki wrote an historical chronicle; but it does accept an historical foundation for the main outline of the Rāma-story as found in Vālmīki's work. It must be noted here, however, that we have to dissect the vulgate Rāmāyaṇa, cutting away interpolations, in order to find what probably was composed by Vālmīki himself.

There are four factors which indicate an historical foundation for Vālmīki's work. The first is that, in the Buddhist Tipiṭaka, allusions to the Rāma-story refer to events and persons as being historical. Then, in contradistinction to the myths and allegories of Vedic literature, ballads *(nārāsansī gāthas* such as the early Rāma-ballads) always deal with historical events and persons. Thirdly, the Mahābhārata gives the Rāma-story in the *ṣoḍaśarājakīya*, a section which deals with sixteen historical kings. Finally, the fact that Vālmīki tells the story of the unchivalrous killing of Vāli confirms the fact that Vālmīki received the story of Rāma as being based on historical fact: for an author would hardly relate a deed which might belittle his hero unless the deed was known to have happened.

***c. Date*:** Probably Rāma lived in the eighth or seventh century B.C. This opinion is based on the fact that in Vedic literature (Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, etc.), certainly up to the sixth century B.C., there is no reference to the Rāma-story. This absence might seem to point to a later date than that given above except for the fact that the ballads of the Rāma-story had become wide-spread by the fourth century B.C. Consequently, we place Rāma in the eighth or seventh century B.C., contradicting Hindu purānic tradition which places him in the vicinity of 2000 B.C.

B. The Authentic Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa

***a. Chief Characteristics*.** The genius of Vālmīki moulded the adventures of Rāma into an epic which occupies a unique place in world literature, and which for centuries has influenced the culture both of India and of neighbouring countries. The tremendous influence of the Rāmāyaṇa has been due, partly to the pathos and charm of the Rāma-story itself as it existed before Vālmīki, and even more so to the combination of artistic qualities and moral values woven by him into the epic.

When we study the Rāmāyaṇa we find that Vālmīki's language is both simple and lucid, that his figures of speech are natural and uninvolved, that his descriptions of nature are poetic and true, and that his character portrayals point to a deep understanding of the human heart. These literary qualities, however, are also found in other great epics, and it is not first and foremost by its literary excellence that the Rāmāyaṇa occupies the place in world literature that it does. It is by the moral ideals of truthfulness and self-control, by the pictures of domestic and social virtues, by its belief in life as a battle between good and evil that the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa won its place and conquered the heart of religious-minded India.

This is the aspect of the Rāmāyaṇa that is usually selected for special praise. The *Padmapurāṇa* says that in the *Rāma* story "we meet face to face the rules of Dharma, a woman's fidelity to her husband, deep brotherly affection and (youth's) devotedness to the elders. In its verses proper conduct between masters and servants is personified, and, before our very eyes, punishment is meted out to the evil-doer by the scion of Raghu" (Cfr. *Pātāla-Khāṇḍa*, ch. 66, 128-9).

It has been objected that the Rāmāyaṇa lacks balance and proportion, that it is too long, that it relates too many fantastic events, and that its characters are either too good or too bad to be truly human. The objection can be upheld only if the Rāmāyaṇa is considered together with its interpolations. Actually, Vālmīki's masterpiece has suffered much at the hands of uncritical interpolators. These have more than doubled the length of the original epic by adding two entire books (the first and the seventh of the vulgate) and by introducing many hyperbolic descriptions and endless repetitions. This evolution played havoc with the original naturalness and balance of the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. As time went on, Rāma came to be considered a paragon of all virtues, and later even as an avatāra of Viṣṇu; Rāvaṇa, on the other hand, became a monster with ten heads and twenty arms, the embodiment of all evil.

The origin of the belief that Rāvaṇa had ten heads, for instance, is fairly simple. The numerical prefix of many names in Sanskrit is often to be taken in a metaphorical sense. Rāvaṇa had been called Daśagrīva (ten-necked), that is, having the strength of ten. In the course of time this figure of speech was taken literally. However, there are many passages where Rāvaṇa is described as having one head and two arms only, as, for instance, when Hanumān, looking for Sītā in Rāvaṇa's palace, saw Rāvaṇa asleep (V, canto 10). Explicit reference is made to his two powerful arms (in the dual, V, 15-22), to his radiant countenance (the singular being used, v. 25), and to the breath issuing from his mouth (again the singular being used, v.24). This is so striking that the commentator Govindarāja suggests in explanation, that one face and two arms are mentioned in order to make him appear attractive to his consorts. Another commentator states that Rāvaṇa assumed his terrible appearance on the battlefield only.

The mention of the monkeys and bears as allies of Rāma does not present any serious difficulty either. These were simply aboriginals who bore those names as their totems just as their descendants do even to this day.

b. Contents. The following is a conspectus of the five genuine books of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. Interpolations are indicated by square brackets. Later, in section C, the question of interpolations will be dealt with.

Book Two—AYODHYĀKĀNDA

Daśaratha, king of Ayodhyā, had four sons. The eldest was Rāma, son of Kauśalya. Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna were sons of Sumitrā. Bharata was the son of his favourite queen, Kaikeyī, to whom he had given the privilege of asking any two boons which he promised to grant. As he was growing old he decided to instal Rāma as heir-apparent to the throne. Mantharā, the maidservant of Kaikeyī, wanted to prevent this through hatred of Rāma, so she persuaded her mistress to ask for the two boons Daśaratha had promised. The first boon would be the banishment of Rāma to the forests for fourteen years, and the second boon would be the installation of her own son Bharatha as the heir-apparent. Daśaratha granted the two boons and Rāma prepared to leave the city. Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa both pleaded for permission to accompany him, and this permission was granted. So the exiles left the city in a southerly direction; after crossing the Ganges with the help of Guha they visited the āshram of Bharadvāja at Prayāga (Allahabad), crossed the Yamunā, and reached Citrakūṭa where they built a hut. Soon after their departure Daśaratha died of grief. His sons Bharata and Śatrughna who had been absent from Ayodhyā up to this time returned for the funeral rites. Bharata refused the throne and visited Rāma in the forest. He pleaded with Rāma to return and to rule, but Rāma refused. After pleading in vain, Bharata returned to Ayodhyā with Rāma's sandals. These he placed on the throne as a symbol of Rāma, and he himself resided outside the city at Nandigrāma, from whence he attended to the government of the kingdom. Rāma left Citrakūṭa soon after Bharata's visit, [visited the āshram of Atri] and penetrated farther into the jungles towards the south.

Book Three—ARANYĀKĀNDA

[During this journey the demon Virādha is slain and the exiles visit the āshrams of Sarabhaṅga, Sutīkṣana and Agastya; they also meet the vulture Jaṭāyu.]

Eventually Rāma and his companions arrived at Pancavatī and built a hut there. After this Śūrpaṇakhā, Rāvaṇa's sister, was mutilated by Lakṣmaṇa, and the armies of the demons Khara and Dūsaṇa were defeated. Śūrpaṇakhā reported all this to Rāvaṇa and incited him to kidnap Sītā.

(At the request of Rāvaṇa the demon Mārīca transformed himself into a golden deer and enticed Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa away from the hut.)

In their absence Rāvaṇa kidnapped Sītā. The vulture Jaṭāyu attacked Rāvaṇa but was mortally wounded. Sītā was placed in the Aśokavana, the garden of Lankā. When Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa returned to find their hut empty and Sītā missing, they immediately began their search for Sītā. On their way they met the dying vulture Jaṭāyu, killed the monster Kabandha and visited Śabarī in her āshram.

Book Four—KIṢKINDHĀKĀNDA

Sugrīva was exiled to the forest by his brother Vālī. He sent Hanumān to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and after a test of Rāma's strength had been made, made an alliance with Rāma. While Vālī was engaged in a duel with Sugrīva, Rāma shot him with an arrow and killed him. The throne of Kiṣkindha was restored to Sugrīva. After the rainy season Sugrīva sent Hanumān with some companions to the south to search for Sītā. At first these found no trace of her and were on the point of despairing when they met Sampāti, the brother of Jaṭāyu. Sampāti told them that his son Supārśva had seen a dark-coloured man carrying a woman across the hills travelling on foot.

(It is worthy of note that this passage shows that originally there was no question of an aerial chariot in which Rāvaṇa took Sītā to Laṅkā; also the location of Laṅkā is somewhere in central India and certainly not in Ceylon, the latter location being due to later Buddhist literature). Sampāti also told Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa that the man was Rāvaṇa, the demon-king of *Laṅkā*, the city that lies across the waters at which they had now arrived.

Book Five—SUNDARĀKĀNDA

After a phenomenal jump [later described as crossing the sea] Hanumān arrived at Laṅkā and found Sītā in the Aśokavan surrounded by guards. He witnessed Rāvaṇa's visit to Sītā and his futile attempt to win her favour. Hanumān revealed himself to Sītā when she had been left alone, assured her of a speedy deliverance and hurried back to his companions. [Hanumān destroyed the garden, killed some demons and was captured by Indrajit, one of Rāvaṇa's sons. At the intercession of Vibhīṣana, a brother of Rāvaṇa, Hanumān was punished instead of being killed, and they set fire to the oil-saturated cloths which they had wound onto his tail. Hanumān freed himself and jumping from roof to roof, set fire to the city of Laṅkā]. Finally Hanumān and his companions returned to Rāma with the news that Sītā had been found a captive at Laṅkā.

Book Six—YUDDHĀKĀNDA

The monkey-host began its march on Laṅkā and so reached the edge of the waters. Meanwhile Rāvaṇa held council. When he rejected Vibhīṣana's proposal to avoid war by returning Sītā, Vibhīṣana took refuge with Rāma. A bridge was built across the waters and Laṅkā was invested. [Some of Rāvaṇa's spies who had been caught were sent back to Rāma. A Māyāśīra, artificial head of Rāma, was shown to Sītā but Vibhīṣana's daughter revealed the fraud to her.] Rāma sent Aṅgada as ambassador to Rāvaṇa, but the latter obstinately refused to return Sītā.

Then a long series of battles and duels followed. The chief events were: Indrajit wounded Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa who lay unconscious on the battlefield bound by snake-arrows. [They were freed by Garuda]. Then Kumbhakarna, the brother of Rāvaṇa that sleeps for six months and remains awake for one day, was awakened; he entered the battle-field, won a great victory,but eventually was killed by Rāma. Indrajit wounded many, including Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. [Hanumān was sent to the Himālayas to fetch certain herbs and when he was unable to find them, he brought the whole summit of the mountain to Laṅkā, returning it later. The herbs cured all the wounded]. Laṅkā was set on fire at night-time by the monkeys. Indrajit again entered the battle-field and decapitated an illusory Sītā in order to discourage Rāma, but Vibhīṣana revealed the fraud. Then he withdrew to Nikumbhila to perform a sacrifice that would make him invincible, but he was prevented from performing it by the monkeys, and killed by Lakṣmaṇa.

Rāvaṇa wounded Lakṣmaṇa with the spear called Sakti. [Hanumān again fetched the mountain with the herbs from the Himālayas]. The battle ended with a duel between Rāma and Rāvaṇa in which the latter was killed. Then Vibhīṣana was crowned king in his place. [Rāma called Sītā into his presence and addressed hard words to her, intending to abandon her. Sītā protested her innocence and she told Lakṣmaṇa to prepare a fire. She fearlessly entered the fire and was restored to Rāma by the god Agni. Rāma accepted Sītā and began the return journey in the Puspaka, aerial chariot of Rāvana.] Rāma was crowned king of Ayodhyā [where he reigned for ten thousand years and had thousands of sons.] His reign, the proverbial Rāmarājya, is described in glowing terms: there was no sickness, no sorrow, no fear of wild animals or of thieves, no drought, no infantile mortality. All were pious, truthful and devoted to the practice of good works.

C. The Vulgate Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa

a. The Problem of Interpolation. The subject-matter of the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa as given above ignores the first and last books of the printed editions. In addition it designates as spurious such popular stories as the burning of Laṅkā, the flight of Hanumān to the Himālayas and the fire-ordeal of Sītā. Now we must consider the reasons which justify what might appear an arbitrary dissection. We shall therefore begin by making an examination of the vulgate Rāmāyaṇa.

There are three widely different recensions of the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa, each of which includes the two spurious books, one and seven. They are: the Southern Recension, the Bengal Recension and the North-Western Recension. The Southern Recension has been printed often in Bombay and in South India. The Bengal Recension was first printed in Paris in 1843 A.D. and later in Calcutta. The North-Western Recension was published in Lahore in 1923 A.D. Dr. H. Jacobi in his *Das Rāmāyaṇa* classifies the differences in these three main Recensions under the following heads:

1. Each recension has a large number of verses, even longer passages and entire cantos, which are not to be found in one, or, at times, even both of the others. Comparing the Southern and Bengal recensions we find that one third of the verses are proper to each recension.

2. Each recension differs from one, or at times, even both of the others in the common verses; the Southern recension usually has the more original text.

3. The sequence of the verses is often different even in all three recensions.

If we had the differences listed under No. 1 only, we might consider them as additions or omissions, but those under Nos 2 and 3 prove that the recensions were independently written down on the basis of a text, differing in its oral transmission. The important thing about the above is that it proves conclusively that we have not got the poem as composed by Vālmīki, and that later interpolators have made substantial additions to what must have been the original Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. This is not hard to explain if we remember that the poem became at first the property of wandering balladists, the Kusīlavas mentioned in the Bālakāṇḍa, sarga 4, and also in the Uttarakāṇḍa, sarga 93. These men earned their living by travelling from place to place, singing the Rāmāyaṇa. Knowing it by heart they handed it down to posterity, so it was not strange that the most gifted of them who knew thousands of verses by heart, easily enlarged those portions which proved to be most popular and added new material to satisfy the curiosity of their hearers. In this way the Bālakāṇḍa and Uttarakāṇḍa were begun. Then at a later stage the epic fell into the hands of Brāhmin interpolators who must be held responsible for the purāṇic sections in both these books which show a distinctly priestly bias. The evolution of the vulgate-Rāmāyaṇa must have been complete by the second century A.D.

Briefly then, the evolution of the Rāmāyaṇa is as follows. The authentic Rāmāyaṇa must have been composed towards the end of the fourth century B.C. Then came the interpolations by the bards, starting with an introduction which eventually became the Bālakāṇḍa; the oldest portions of the Bālakāṇḍa belong probably to the first century B.C., and the divinisation of Rāma probably took shape somewhere at the end of the same century. Finally, the priestly bias must have been incorporated in the first centuries A.D. so that by the second century A.D., the Rāmāyaṇa had reached the last stages of its development.

No very ancient manuscripts are available to help us solve the problems of interpolation. For instance, at the Oriental Institute of Baroda a survey was made of some two thousand extant manuscripts of the Rāmāyaṇa; from these, eighty-six were chosen for the collation of Bālakāṇḍa; finally, thirty-seven manuscripts were selected as the basis of the critical edition of the first book. Of these manuscripts one is a palm-leaf manuscript from Nepal, in Newārī characters, and is dated S. 1076 which is being interpreted as A.D. 1020. Of the other manuscripts, one belongs to the fourteenth century A.D., a third to the fifteenth, three to the sixteenth, three to the seventeenth, four to the eighteenth, eight to the nineteenth century, the rest being undated. If we remember that Vālmīki wrote somewhere about 300 B.C., we realise the impossibility of reconstituting fully the original epic. We must rely on divergencies in the various recensions and on internal contradictions in the text to detect the interpolated material.

***b. Book One, Bālakāṇḍa*:** The chief arguments that prove the whole of this book to be an interpolation are as follows: (1) The first canto of the Bālakāṇḍa gives a conspectus of the whole poem without making a single reference to the subject-matter of the Bālakāṇḍa itself. Later this anomaly is corrected by the insertion of a second table of contents in sarga 3, in which the subject-matter of the Bālakāṇḍa is incorporated. (2) The style and composition of the Bālakāṇḍa lacks unity and contains much material that has no direct bearing on the Rāma-story. More than half the book is devoted to mythological stories, whereas the genuine books contain none of these. (3) The matter of the Bālakāṇḍa is never referred to in the genuine books of the Rāmāyaṇa. Moreover, there are a few contradictions between the Bālakāṇḍa and the following books. For instance, the marriage of Lakṣmaṇa and Urmilā, which is clearly mentioned in the Bālakāṇḍa, is not only not mentioned in the rest of the poem (especially the lengthy farewells of the exiles) but is contradicted in the Araṇyakāṇḍa where, in sarga 18, Lakṣmaṇa is said to be unmarried.

The genesis of the Bālakāṇḍa is probably as follows. At first a short conspectus of the poem was prefixed by the balladists as an introduction. Then the listeners were told who Vālmīki was and how it came about that he composed his poem. Then, quite naturally, people started asking questions about the circumstances of Rāma's birth, about his childhood, about Sītā, about her marriage to Rāma, and so on. The answers to these questions formed the first nucleus of the Bālakāṇḍa. Internal evidence shows that the purāṇic stories and the two episodes referring to Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu did not belong to the original Bālakāṇḍa. One example of such internal evidence is given here: The first canto celebrates at length the excellence of Rāma and compares him to Viṣṇu in valour, but clearly states that after his reign on earth Rāma will go to Brahmaloka (see v. 97). If the author of this eulogy had been aware that Rāma was an incarnation of Viṣṇu, he would surely have mentioned it among his qualities and he surely would not have placed him in Brahmaloka after his death. (This is borne out by the fact that the Bengal and North-Western recensions have changed Brahmaloka into Viṣṇuloka). The contents of the Bālakāṇḍa are given below; those portions which are clearly later additions are given in square brackets.

1. Introduction: Cantos 1—4. A conversation between Vālmīki and Nārada, wherein Nārada eulogises Rāma and gives a bird's eye-view of the events of books II to VI, marks the beginning (canto 1. Then comes the creation of the Sloka by Vālmīki; Brahmā orders Vālmīki to compose the Rāmāyaṇa (canto 2). After this we find a table of contents of the Rāmāyaṇa (canto 3). Finally, two disciples of Vālmīki sing the Rāmāyaṇa in public places and before the court of Ayodhyā (canto 4).

2. Daśaratha's Sacrifices: Cantos 5—17. First there is a description of Ayodhyā and of the horse-sacrifice; [then is given the *Putreṣṭiyajña, i.e.*, sacrifice for obtaining a son, where clear reference is made to Viṣṇu's incarnation in Rāma and his brothers.]

3. Rāma's Birth and Youthful Exploits: Cantos 18—31. The birth of the four brothers is described, then how Viśvāmitra arrives and goes away with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. The encounter with Taṭakā, Mārica and Subāhu is described.

4. [Purāṇic Stories: Cantos 32—65. Viśvāmitra's family-history is given; the descent of the Ganges, the churning of the ocean, Ahalyā's deliverance and the long story of how Viśvāmitra became a Brāhmin are given.]

5. Rāma's Marriage: Cantos 66—77. First is given the story of the breaking of the bow at Mithilā; this is followed by the marriage of Rāma and his three brothers, [the encounter with Paraśurāma], and the arrival in Ayodhyā.

c. Interpolations in the Five Genuine Books: From the point of view of later development in the Rāma-story the most important change introduced is the fact that Rāma came to be considered as an avatāra of Viṣṇu. A dispassionate examination of the original sources shows clearly that, according to Vālmīki, Rāma was a noble king, and a great warrior, but definitely not divine. Very few verses occur in the five genuine books of the printed Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa which refer to Rāma as being an avatāra of Viṣṇu. Much fewer still are those among them which are to be found in the parallel passages of the three recensions; and in those extremely rare cases, they occur in those portions which are proved to be later interpolations for other reasons. Moreover, none of the characters of the Rāmāyaṇa (not excluding Rāma and Sītā) are aware of Rāma being an avatāra of Viṣṇu. When Rāvaṇa pleads with Sītā to abandon Rāma who, in his words is only an ordinary mortal, she does not answer by denying this (cfr. VI, 48, 14). Rāma too is pictured as considering himself to be a mere human being; not only does he refuse to seize the throne because he is afraid of sin and of punishment (II, 56, 26) but he is convinced that his present misfortunes are due to the sins he committed in a previous birth (cfr. III, 63, 4; VI, 101: 18). This clearly shows that in the mind of Vālmīki Rāma was purely human. It is not possible to determine exactly the period at which Rāma was made into an avatāra of Viṣṇu. But we cannot be far wrong if we put this round about the beginning of the Christian era, or even as early as the first century B.C. For several centuries the Rāma-ballads had sung the praises of Rāma. Then Vālmīki's genius had further idealised him and greatly increased his popularity. On the other hand, the old idea of God becoming manifest on earth in various forms had received great impetus since the third or the early second century B.C., when Kṛṣṇa had been identified with Viṣṇu. So it was almost inevitable that Rāma also should be divinised as an avatāra of Viṣṇu. The naturalness of this process is evidenced by the fact that the Buddhists and, much later, the Jains adapted the Rāma-story to their religious beliefs. Indeed, in several jātakas Rāma came to be considered as a Bodhisattva (Buddha in a previous birth) while, on the other hand, the Jains created a vast Rāma literature in which Rāma is one of the sixty-three Mahāpuruṣas.

The other interpolations in the genuine books of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa are for the most part simply repetitions of events and pathetic passages, and additions of marvellous, preternatural happenings, such as Hanumān's flying to the Himālayas, the burning of Laṅkā and the fire-ordeal of Sītā.

Let us examine the evidence regarding the fire-ordeal of Sītā. The first reason which leads us to suspect that it may not be authentic is the sudden reversal in the feelings of Rāma contrary to the characterisation so far given him. From the time of Sītā's kidnapping, Rāma had been longing for her and many cantos are devoted to describe his laments because of her absence. Even at the beginning of the sixth book he had explicitly stated that his sorrow because of his separation from Sītā was increasing day by day. Later still, when he was told that Indrajit had beheaded Sītā, he, "overwhelmed with grief, fell to the earth as a tree falls when its roots are severed." Then, in keeping with this love, as soon as Rāvaṇa was slain he sent Hanumān to enquire after Sītā's welfare and to tell her of his victory; Hanumān obeyed and returned to Rāma with good news of Sītā. Then the characterisation changes as Rāma orders Vibhīṣaṇa to bring Sītā, into his presence. She is ordered to leave her palanquin and come to him on foot, stared at by all the monkeys. This treatment grieved Lakṣmaṇa, Sugrīva and Hanumān, but worse was to come. As Sītā stood before Rāma he told her that he had killed Rāvaṇa not because he desired to have her back but because he wanted to vindicate his honour. He went on to say that he suspected her fidelity, that he would not take her back and that she was free to go where she willed, even to live with Lakṣmaṇa, or with Bharata, or Śatrughna, or Sugrīva, or Vibhīsaṇa, if she desired. When Sītā heard this cruel denunciation she insisted on her own fidelity and innocence; she told Lakṣmaṇa to prepare a funeral pyre and when it was ready she unhesitatingly entered it. In the meantime the gods arrived to praise Rāma and to attest to Sītā's innocence. The god Agni himself appeared in the fire holding Sītā protectingly and testifying to her innocence; he entrusted her to Rāma. Then Rāma stated that he had never doubted her fidelity but had spoken in order to purify her and to forestall any idle gossip.

This sudden reversal of Rāma's feelings which is inconsistent with the characterisation so far given him is sufficient proof that the whole incident is a clumsy interpolation. Further proofs are not lacking. For instance, if this so striking episode had been part and parcel of the original epic, it would have been mentioned later on in the narrative and also in any fairly comprehensive conspectus of the contents of the Rāmāyaṇa. Such, however, is not the case. At the end of the sixth book neither Bharadvāja nor Hanumān refer to the fire-ordeal although both give a survey of the events narrated in books II—VI. Furthermore, neither of the two tables of contents at the beginning of the Bālakāṇḍa make mention of the fire-ordeal. It is true that the first table was supposed to contain such a reference, but the critical edition of Baroda rightly considers this as a later addition and relegates the reference to a footnote. The silence of the Uttarakāṇḍa is still more significant. When Sītā was calumniated by the people, the obvious defence should have been a reference to the fire-ordeal, but this reference is lacking from the Bengal and North-West recensions and the reference in the Southern recensions is certainly a later addition. At the end of the Uttarākāṇḍa Rāma explicitly states that he had accepted Sītā back only after she had taken a solemn oath as to her innocence, but there is no reference to what should be considered a much more conclusive proof such as the fire-ordeal would have been if it had taken place. Finally, the Rāmopākhyāna of the Mahābhārata makes no mention of this episode.

d. *Book Seven—Uttarākāṇḍa*

The contents of the Uttarākāṇḍa are as follows, the later interpolations being given in square brackets:

1. (The story of Rāvaṇa is related in thirty-four cantos and that of Hanumān in two cantos).

2. The narratives of the Yuddhakāṇḍa is taken up, beginning from the day after Rāma's coronation. *[The farewell of the guests includes many who had left at the end of the sixth book.]*

3. Then comes the repudiation of Sītā related in eleven cantos. The people blame Rāma for receiving Sītā into his house after she had spent so long in Rāvaṇa's house. Accordingly Laksmaṇa is ordered to abandon her in the forest; he does so, leaving her in the vicinity of Vālmīki's āshram, and here she receives shelter.

4. [Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa the purāṇic stories of Nṛga, Nimi and Yayāti].

5. Satrughna is sent to kill the demon Lavaṇa. On his way he spends the night at Vālmīki's āshram, his visit coinciding with Sītā's delivery of twins, both boys. He proceeds on his way, kills Lavaṇa and founds the city of Madhupura. Twelve years later he returns to Ayodhyā, stops again at Vālmīki's āshram, and there he hears the twins recite the Rāmāyaṇa.

6. (A Brāhmiṇ's son dies at a young age; Nārada reveals the cause of this death; a low caste Śūdra, Sambūka by name, was practising asceticism, contrary to caste-rule, Rāma goes and kills him).

7. Then Rāma's horse-sacrifice is related. Vālmīki and the two twins Kusa and Lava attend this, and the boys sing the Rāmāyaṇa before the assembly. When Rāma learns that they are the sons of Sītā, he tells Vālmīki to fetch Sītā so that she might take a solemn oath before all the people and be purified. Sītā comes and she takes the famous oath: "If I have never thought of any but of Rāma, let the goddess earth swallow me up; if I have always worshipped him in thought, word and deed, let the goddess earth swallow me up; if it is true that I have known none but Rāma, let the goddess earth swallow me up." Then the earth opens and takes Sītā. On the following day, the boys sing the last part of the Uttarākāṇḍa.

8. Then the conquests of the sons of Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata are narrated. Lakṣmaṇa's tragic death followed by the description of Kuśa settling at Kuśvati and Lava's settling at Srāvastī. Finally, Rāma, Bharata, Śatrughna and the citizens of Ayodhyā leave the city and go in procession to the river Sarayu. There Rāma and his brothers enter bodily into the Viṣṇu form. The citizens abandon their bodies to the river and acquire heaven.

The chief arguments that prove the entire book to be spurious are as follows.

1. The conclusion of Book Six shows clearly that at the time of its composition, the Rāmāyaṇa was considered to have ended there.

2. The conspectus of the whole poem as given in the first canto of the Bālakāṇḍa does not refer to any event related in either the first or last book. It is only later that a second table of contents has been added in canto three in which the events of the Bālakāṇḍa are given fairly completely and mention is made of a supplement; but the only event of the seventh book which is mentioned is the repudiation of Sītā. It would seem therefore that even at the time of composition of this second table of contents, the Uttarākāṇḍa was still far from having reached its present extent. This is confirmed by the fact that at a still later date a third conspectus has been inserted into the Bengal and North-West recensions in which mention is made of the chief events of the seventh book.

3. There is also the fact that the narrative is very disconnected, that it contains many purāṇic stories which have no direct bearing on the plot and that some of the contents contradict those of previous books.

D. The Hindi Rāmāyaṇa of Tulasīdās

a. Rāmacaritamānasa: Instead of ending this chapter with a survey of the later Rāmāyaṇas, as in the earlier editions, the purpose of this book will be better served with a characterization of the Hindi *Rāmacaritamānasa* (The Holy Lake of Rāma's Acts). It will be culled from several articles published by Fr. Bulcke (cf. Bibliography).

The *Rāmacaritamānasa* was composed by Goswāmi Tulasīdās (in Avadhi, a literary dialect) over four hundred years ago in Ayodhyā. Ever since it has enjoyed an unequalled popularity among the teeming millions of North-India. Its moral and religious influence upon them remains profound.

Tulasīdās' purpose was to propose the devotion to Rāma as "the royal road to salvation". Acknowledging his debt to Vālmīki, he compares his work to a bridge built by a king: "A river may be very broad, but if a king has built a bridge across it, even tiny ants can climb over it and reach the other side with ease. Even so I shall take heart of grace and relate the charming story of Raghupati." (I,13).

From about the first century A.D., Rāma had begun to be considered as an *avatāra* (descent) of Viṣṇu along with his brothers, but then from the eleventh century as an avatāra of the supreme Brahman and the object of a bhakti cult. This is expressed brilliantly in the Sanskrit *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (14th cent.), one of the main sources of Tulasīdās. The latter left out the first and the last books added to Vālmīki's original work and modified some episodes he found incongruous to his purpose.

b. Characteristics of his Dāsya Bhakti. In III.46, he makes Rāma describe the virtues of his devout servants (*dāsya bhaktā):*

[1] They display no pride or self-conceit or arrogance
[2] nor even dream of setting foot upon the path of vice;
[3] they are ever singing, or listening to, my sporting acts;
[4] unselfishly devoted to the good of others *(para-hita).*

And this is how he explains these four elements of Rāma bhakti:

[1] The **foundation of bhakti** is a humble acknowledgment of one's sinfulness, a constant effort to fulfil God's will and a trustful surrender to God. One of Tulasī's most beautiful prayers begins as follows:

Tū dayālu, dīna hau; tū dāni, hau bhikhārī
hau prasiddha pātakī, tū pāpa-punja-hāri,
You, the compassionate, I, a wretched,
You, the generous, I, a beggar,

I, a 'well-known sinner, You, the remover of all sins, and ends

Tulasī kṛpālu! caraṇa-śaraṇam pāvai

O Merciful one! may Tulasī find refuge at your feet.

(*Vinaya-patrikā*, No.79)

[2] The first of the three chief characteristics of his *bhakti-mārga* is his insistence on moral conduct with the help of divine grace. In his introduction, he writes: "I have here (in Ayodhyā) begun this sacred story destructive of all lust and pride and hypocrisy in him who hears it. Its name is the Holy Lake of Rāma's Acts, and its listeners are refreshed; a soul that burns with the fever of worldly desire like an elephant in a forest fire, is happy if it plunges into this lake. It puts an end to wicked ways and all the sin of this kaliyuga." (*Campai* 35)

[3] The second characteristic is *single-minded devotion to Rāma along his royal way*. It is called royal because, like the king's roads, *it is open to all* since every human being is invited and qualified to tread it:

"It is great good fortune to be born as a man. The human body is an instrument for virtuous practices, it is the gateway to deliverance." (VII.43) It is the way of householders; no *sannyāsa* is required but only the performance of normal duties. It transcends the differences of sex or caste: When Śabarī tells Rāma, "I am a woman of lowly caste and altogether ignorant," Rāma answers, "Listen, lady, to my words. There is but one relationship I recognize, the relationship of bhakti." And when the forest-dwellers come to greet Rāma, Tulasī exclaims, "That Lord Whom the Vedas cannot define nor the minds of the sages comprehend, listened to the Kirātas' words like a father to the prattling of his child. Nothing but love is dear to Rāma" *(Rāmahi keval premu piārā)* (II.137).

[4] The third characteristic and the most novel is the *social dimension of Rāma-bhakti*. To the long quest of India, "how to serve God?" Tulasī answers with the words of Rāma to his most typical devotee, Bharata: "Brother, there is no dharma like good done to others *(para-hita)*, no adharma like doing harm to others" (VII.41). Rāma-bhaktās are compassionate: "poets said that the hearts of saints are like butter, but they missed the truth of the matter: for butter melts from its own heat but the most holy saints melt when another is tried in the fire" (VII.125). Moreover, these bhaktās even

forgive and do good to their enemies: "They behave like the sandal-tree towards the axe; for the axe cuts down the tree, but — mark it brother — the sandal-tree perfumes the very axe that wounds and kills it" (VII.37).

This was the highest point reached by a poet from within the *bhakti* tradition. It was two centuries before another Hindu, Rāmmohan Roy, discovered it as "the guidance to happiness" in the Gospels of Jesus Christ (see ch.26).

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Chapter 20

The Mahābhārata

(R. Antoine)

A. Nature of the Work

"Mahābhārata" is an abbreviated form of *Mahābhārata-yuddha* which means "The Great Battle of the Bhāratas. The Bhāratas are the descendants of Bhārata, the royal ancestor of the princes settled in Northern India, in the country of the Upper Ganges and the Jumna. As in other countries, so also in India, such princely rulers liked to celebrate the heroic feats of their ancestors. Bards and singers *(sūta and kuśilava)*, either attached to the royal courts or going from place to place, recited and sang the past glories of famous heroes. There must have been various groups or cycles of epic stories to which the professional reciters added new chapters in order to please their audience. Two of those cycles grew into gigantic epic poems: the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata.

The nucleus of the Mahābhārata is the family feud between two branches of Bhārata's dynasty. It forms the central story of the epic and extols the prowess of great heroes in a terrible war of annihilation.

But the Mahābhārata is much more than an epic poem. In the course of centuries, after it had ceased to be the monopoly of royal courts and had become the most popular story, different influences gradually transformed the heroic poem into a vast store-house of legends, theology, moral instructions, philosophical speculations and legal prescriptions. It may be said that the Mahābhārata is the mirror of Indian life throughout several centuries, a mirror in which popular beliefs, social customs, religious practice and speculation, folklore, civil and criminal law are reflected. It is a gigantic work counting about100,000 slokas (a sloka is a stanza of either two or four verses). It is eight times as big as the Iliad and the Odyssey put together, and three and a half times as big as the entire Bible. In that mass of accumulated material, the original story of the family feud is almost drowned and occupies only one fifth of the whole.

The main influences at work in the development of the Mahābhārata from a simple epic narrative into a vast encyclopaedia are the following:

a) Additional bard poetry giving genealogies and the legends of other dynasties. One of the most famous of those legends is the charming story of Nala and Damayantī narrated to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bṛhadaśva.

b) Brāhmanical myths and legends: the Brāhmins soon exploited the popularity of the Mahābhārata to impart their own teaching. Mythological accounts, narratives extolling the power of sacrifices, battles of gods and demons, exaltation of the Brāhmins and prescriptions regarding the respect and worship due to Brāhmins are the main features of those contributions to the Mahābhārata.

c) Popular fables and moral narratives teaching a much broader morality than the brahmanical portions. The jackal, the cat, the birds and other animals are the heroes of fables, while, in the parables, symbolic beings represent the realities of human existence: a forest is the symbol of life in this world; beasts of prey are diseases, the old witch is old age, the dragon is time, the mice are the fleeting days and nights, etc. Stories of self-sacrificing kings or holy hermits practising penance, stories inculcating resignation before fate and death, stories extolling the love of a mother, stories exemplifying compassion towards all beings, stories opposing to the brāhmanical ideal of study and ritualism the simpler morality of detachment, are found in abundance. Here is a short extract in which the ascetical ideal is contrasted with the Brāhmin's insistence on the performing of external rites:

> "Thou dost advise that I should please with sacrifice the deities. Such rites I disregard as vain; through these can none perfection gain. Why sate the gods, at cruel feasts, with flesh and blood of slaughtered beasts? Far other sacrifices I will offer unremittingly; the sacrifice of calm, of truth, the sacrifice of peace, of truth, of life serenely, purely spent, of thought profound on Brahman bent. Who offers these may death defy, and hope for immortality."

d) Finally, very long didactic portions consisting of lengthy discourses and discussions on *nīti* (worldly wisdom and politics), *dharma* (law and morality) and *mokṣa* (liberation), have considerably increased the bulk of the Mahābhārata. Books XII and XIII containing some 22,000 slokas are almost exclusively didactic. Of those didactic portions the most famous is the *Bhagavadgītā* found in Book VI.

How long did it take for the Mahābhārata to become the enormous compilation which has been described above? A definite answer to that question is not possible. Roughly speaking, it can be said that it must have taken about eight or nine centuries. The central story of the feud between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas must have existed already in the fourth or fifth century B.C. By the fourth century A.D. the compilation was completed. It is not possible to determine at what date the different additions were made, although one can, with a certain amount of accuracy, point out some of the later additions.

B. The Mahābhārata-story

The Mahābhārata is divided into 18 *parvans* or sections, each section being itself divided into chapters. We shall insist on the main theme, indicating the most important additions as we follow the story. It is important to become familiar with the names and characters of the main heroes, because every Indian child knows them and their feats and achievements, and because modern Indian Literatures draw from the Mahābhārata a wealth of comparisons and sayings which evoke in the Indian mind the incidents and lessons of the great battle.

I. *Ādi-parvan:* The Opening Section
(234 chapters; about 9000 ślokas).

After some 60 chapters of introduction, the story begins with the account of the genealogy of the Bhāratas. The ancestor of the royal house of the Kurus is *Śāntanu.*

Śāntanu married the goddess *Gaṅga*: their son is *Bhīṣma.* Śāntanu takes as second wife the daughter of a fisher-man, *Satyavatī*, who gives him two sons, *Chitrāṅgada* and *Vicitravīrya.* Both die without children and, *Bhīṣma* refusing to break his vow of chastity, *Vyāsa,* the illegitimate son of Satyavatī is called upon to beget descendants. Vyāsa is very ugly and, at his approach, the first widow of Vicitravīrya closes her eyes and gives birth to a blind son, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra.* The second widow grows pale and gives birth to a pale child, *Pāṇḍu.* Third child, *Vidura*, is born to Vyāsa from a royal maid.

Bhīṣma, virtuous ruler, arranges for the marriage of his three nephews. Dhṛtarāṣṭra the blind prince, marries *Gāndhārī* and begets one hundred sons. The eldest is *Duryodhana.* Pāṇḍu has two wives, *Kuntī* and *Mādrī,* but has been forbidden under the pain of death to have intercourse with them. Kuntī, before her marriage, has obtained a son from the Sun-god. She has abandoned the baby, *Karṇa*, whose divine origin will remain hidden. After her marriage, she gives Pāṇḍu three sons, through divine intervention: *Yudhiṣṭhira* is the son of Dharma, *Bhīma*, the son of Vāyu, and *Arjuna*, the son of Indra. Mādrī in her turn gives birth to twin boys, sons of the Aśvins; they are *Nakula* and *Sahadeva*. The five sons of Pāṇḍu are called the five *Pāṇḍavas*. Their father dies and Dhṛtarāṣṭra assumes royal power. His hundred sons, collectively called the *Kauravas*, are educated together with the Pāṇḍavas under the guidance of two brāhmins, *Kṛpa* and *Droṇa*. They are joined by Droṇa's son *Asvatthāman*. Karna, whose real identity remains hidden, is known as the son of the charioteer and despised by his half-brothers, the Pāṇḍavas. A bitter enmity arises between Karna and Arjuna, and Karna decides to give his allegiance to the Kauravas.

When *Yudhiṣṭhira* comes of age, old king Dhṛtarāṣṭra appoints him king and the Pāṇḍavas gain in prestige and power. A plot against them is organised by Duryodhana, his younger brother *Duhśāsana*, their maternal uncle *Śakuni*, a cunning and malevolent old rascal, and Karna. They build a house of lac and invite the Pāṇḍavas to reside in it, with their mother. Warned in time by Vidura, the Pāṇḍavas enter the house, set it on fire and escape to the forest through an underground passage. The Kauravas, thinking their cousins dead, perform the funeral rites, while the Pāṇḍavas are threatened in the forest by the giant *Hidimbā*. Bhīma disposes of the demon, marries his sister, the giantess *Hidimbā*, who gives birth to a son *Ghaṭotkaca*.

The king of Pañcāla, *Drupada*, whose kingdom had been partly conquered by Arjuna under the instigation of Droṇa, is preparing the *svayamvara* of his daughter *Draupadī*. A *svayamvara* is a traditional type of marriage in which the girl is allowed to choose her husband among the numerous candidates who have been invited. Disguised as Brāhmins, the Pāṇḍavas go to Drupada's capital where the Kauravas and a host of other princes are already assembled. The son of Drupada, *Dhṛṣṭadyumna* proclaims that the prince who will be able to bend the big bow of Drupada and hit the mark will obtain Draupadī. as his wife. Prince after prince tries and fails. At last Karṇa, the low-born of Kuntī, is going to succeed when Draupadī. exclaims that she will not accept a charioteer as her husband. Then, from the ranks of the Brāhmins, under a perfect disguise, Arjuna arises, bends the bow and hits the target. Draupadī gives him the garland which indicates her choice. The princes are furious and try to kill Drupada, but Bhīma and Arjuna defeat them, and the five Pāṇḍavas go to their mother Kuntī and decide that Draupadī will be their common wife. They are congratulated by *Kṛṣṇa* and *Baladeva*. The identity of the Pāṇḍavas is revealed. Old Dhṛtarāṣṭra gives them half the kingdom and they settle at Indraprastha (identified with modern Delhi).

In order to avoid jealousy and strife, it is agreed among the five brothers that no one will disturb the private interview of any of them with Draupadī. One day, Arjuna, in quest of weapons, enters the room where Yudhiṣṭira and Draupadī are alone. As a punishment he goes to exile and has many adventures, both amorous and heroic. He visits Kṛṣṇa at Dwarakā, falls in love with Kṛṣṇa's sister *Subhadrā* and carries her away. Subhadrā gives him a son *Abhimanyu*. The friendship between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa grows stronger every day.

II. *Sabhā-parvan:* The Section of the Assembly
(81 chapters; about 3000 ślokas).

The Pāṇḍavas enter upon a series of conquests which confer upon Yudhiṣṭhira the right to assume the title of Ruler of the world. A great sacrifice called *rājasūya* is to be celebrated and all the neighbouring princes are invited. Duryodhana and his brothers are full of envy and hatred and it is their cunning uncle Śakuni who suggests to them the means of humiliating the *Pāṇḍavas*. They will invite Yudhiṣṭhira to a game of dice, and Śakuni, the expert cheat, will defeat him. Old king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, after some hesitation, gives his consent, and Vidura is sent to convey the invitation to Yudhiṣṭhira. A big gathering assembles in the hall of the Kauravas and the game begins. Yudhiṣṭhira loses his treasures, his wealth, his jewels, his chariot, his slaves, his elephants and horses. Then he stakes his land and his kingdom. Unable to control his passion, he stakes his own brothers and himself. Finally, taunted by Śakuni, he stakes Draupadī. The Kauravas triumph. Draupadī refuses to appear in the gambling hall, and Duhśāsana goes and drags her in by the hair. Before the coarse and brutal treatment of Draupadī, Bhīma, unable to control himself, proffers the terrible oath: "May I never attain the resting place of my ancestors if I do not tear open the breast of this evil, foolish outcast of the Bhāratas, in the fight, and drink his blood." Duryodhana insults Draupadī in vilest manner, and Bhīma swears that he will avenge her. Now old king Dhṛtarāṣṭra is frightened and on Draupadī's request, gives back to the Pāṇḍavas their freedom and their kingdom. But Duryodhana is insatiable in his hatred and obtains from his weak father the permission to invite the Pāṇḍavas to another game of dice. This time, the loser will have to go into exile for twelve years, live one more year incognito and return only in the fourteenth year. The Pāṇḍavas lose and prepare to go to exile.

III. *Vana-parvan:* The Forest-Section
(315 chapters; about 18000 ślokas).

In the midst of public desolation, the Pāṇḍavas leave for the forest. In vain Vidura beseeches Dhṛtarāṣṭra to recall them. Kṛṣṇa visits them and incites them to fight. Draupadī and Bhīma support him but Yudhiṣṭhira will keep to his word. In quest of heavenly weapons, Arjuna spends five years in Indra's heaven, while his brothers and Draupadī live the hard existence of forest-dwellers. To console Yudhiṣṭhira the sage Bṛhadaṣva tells him the story of *Nala* and *Damayantī*, a beautiful tale of love and misery. They visit holy places and listen to the stories of holy men and warriors. They are threatened by demons, but Bhīma rescues them. Arjuna returns from Indra's heaven with secret weapons. They live happily for four years in the garden of Kubera. Back in the forest, they listen to many tales and instructions which holy men are eager to tell them. Duryodhana decides to visit his exiled cousins in order to humiliate them, but he is made prisoner by the Gandharvas and, to his utter discomfiture, is rescued by the Pāṇḍavas. Karṇa undertakes extensive conquests and Duryodhana assumes the title of universal monarch. Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus, steals Draupadī whom the Pāṇḍavas rescue. Depressed by the misery of their exile, they draw consolation from the story of Rāma. They also listen to the wonderful story of *Savitrī* who, by her faithful love, was able to call back her husband from the realm of Yama, the god of death. Yudhiṣṭhira is afraid of Karṇa who has been given the gift of invulnerability. Indra, disguised as a Brāhmin, obtains from Karṇa the armour and ear-rings which made him invulnerable and gives him a deadly spear which can be used once only in case of extreme emergency. The four younger Pāṇḍavas die by drinking enchanted water, and Yudhiṣṭhira restores them to life, by answering the questions of the Yakṣa who owns the lake. Here is one specimen of those questions: "Who is the friend of the traveller? Who is the friend of him who remains at home? Who is the friend of the sick? Who is the friend of the dying?" — "A caravan is the friend of the traveller. The wife is the friend of him who remains at home. The doctor is the friend of the sick. Charity is the friend of the dying."

IV. *Virāṭa-parvan:* The Section of King Virāṭa
(72 chapters; about 2500 ślokas).

Thirteen years have elapsed and the Pāṇḍavas have to remain twelve months without being recognised. They hide their weapons near a cemetery and enter the services of king Virāṭa. Yudhiṣṭhira becomes counsellor, Bhīma is engaged as a cook, Arjuna as a dancing-master, Nakula as horse-tamer, Sahadeva as a cowherd and Draupadī as a chambermaid. Bhīma distinguishes himself as a wrestler. Draupadī finds it difficult to reject the advances of the king's brother-in-law, but Bhīma solves the difficulty by strangling him. The five brothers, still unrecognised, help king Virāṭa defeat the Trigartas and the Kauravas. Then, at the close of the thirteenth year, they reveal their identity and king Virāṭa gives his daughter *Uttarā* in marriage to Arjuna's son Abhimanyu.

V. *Udyoga-parvan:* The Section of War-preparation
(196 chapters; about 8000 ślokas).

While attempts at bringing about a peaceful settlement are being made, each side is trying to enlist allies. Kṛṣṇa is approached by both camps and offers an army to Duryodhana while he promises his personal advice and support to Arjuna. King Śalya will fight on the side of the Kauravas as Karṇas's charioteer, but he agrees with Yudhiṣṭhira to manoeuvre the chariot in such a way as to put Karṇa in an unfavourable position. In spite of the entreaties of his old parents, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gandhārī, Duryodhana refuses peace. Kṛṣṇa tries to persuade Karṇa to take the side of the Pāṇḍavas, and Kuntī adds her prayers to Kṛṣṇa's, but Karṇa decides to remain faithful to his friend Duryodhana, although the secret is revealed to him of his real birth from the god Sūrya. Both armies march toward Kurukṣetra. The commander of the Pāṇḍavas in Dhṛṣṭadyumna, son of Drupada and brother of Draupadī. The commander of Kauravas is Bhīṣma.

VI. *Bhīṣma-parvan:* The Section of Bhīṣma
(122 chapters; about 6000 ślokas).

Sañjaya, the charioteer of the blind old king, is given the power to see all that happens on the battle-field and relates everything to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. At this place the 18 chapters of the *Bhagavadgītā* are inserted: Kṛṣṇa, charioteer of Arjuna, teaches him that he must not hesitate to fight, although his enemies are his own relatives. The long and beautiful discourse is a separate work which breaks the narrative of the battle. During ten days, the heroes of both armies are fighting with passion. At night the Pāṇḍavas go to consult Bhīṣma, the commander of their enemies, and learn from him that he will refrain from fighting only when faced by Sikhandin. Sikhandin was a child of Drupada born as a girl. Later he lived as a man, but Bhīṣma, considering him as a woman, would not fight against him. Accordingly, the Pāṇḍavas send him to the battle-field and Arjuna, hidden behind him, pierces Bhīṣma with his arrows. Both armies gather around the fallen hero and leave him lying on a bed of arrows.

VII. *Droṇa-parvan:* The Section of Droṇa
(202 chapters; about 9600 ślokas).

Droṇa succeeds Bhīṣma as commander of the Kauravas. Jayadratha, brother-in-law of Duryodhana, isolates Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna, and kills him. Arjuna avenges his son by killing Jayadratha. Karṇa, in the heat of the battle, uses the deadly spear given him by Indra to kill Ghaṭotkaca, thus losing his power to kill one of the Pāṇḍavas. Droṇa kills Drupada and Virāṭa. Then Kṛṣṇa conceives a trick to dispose of Droṇa: an elephant called Aśvatthāman, like Droṇa's son, has been killed by Bhīma, who shouts with exultation that Aśvatthāman is dead. Yudhiṣṭhira, famous for his love of truth, is persuaded by Kṛṣṇa to repeat the lie, and Droṇa, overwhelmed with sorrow, lays down his arms and falls into deep meditation. Dhṛṣṭadyumna cuts off the head of the old preceptor and throws it into the camp of the Kauravas. We are at the end of the fifteenth day of the battle.

VIII. *Karṇa-parvan:* The Section of Karṇa
(95 chapters; 5000 ślokas).

Karṇa is appointed commander after Droṇa's death. Reluctantly king Śalya accepts to be Karṇa's charioteer. The time of Bhīma's revenge has come: he hurls Duḥśāsana from his chariot, tears open his breast and drinks his blood, thus avenging the honour of Draupadī. Yudhiṣṭhira is wounded. After visiting him, Arjuna returns to battle and the terrible duel between him and Karṇa is engaged. Indra supports Arjuna, and Sūrya, Karṇa. The wheel of Karṇa's chariot sinks into the mud and Arjuna, refusing to allow his opponent to resume a better position, kills him.

IX. *Śalya-parvan:* The Section of Śalya
(65 chapters; about 3600 ślokas).

Śalya takes the succession of Karṇa. In a single-handed fight, he is killed by Yudhiṣṭhira, while Sahadeva kills the old and mischievous Śakuni. The Kauravas are all but defeated. Duryodhana is alone, except for three warriors, Aśvatthāman, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman. He takes refuge in a lake where, through magical power, he hides under the waters. The Pāṇḍavas find him and challenge him. Bhīma will fight him with his club. The two heroes fight while the others look on. On the instigation of Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma strikes an unfair blow on Duryodhana's thigh and kicks him with his left foot. Duryodhana bitterly reproaches Kṛṣṇa for his treachery. (In the middle of this fight a long interpolation has been inserted describing the thirty-three places of pilgrimage visited by Baladeva.) Kṛṣṇa is sent to console Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gandharī. Duryodhana appoints Aśvatthāman commander-in-chief. The Pāṇḍavas retire to the bank of the Oghavatī.

X. *Sauptika-parvan:* The Section of the Sleeping Camp
(18 chapters; about 800 ślokas).

The three surviving Kauravas attack the sleeping Pāṇḍavas at night. Only Kṛṣṇa, the five brothers and the Satyaki are absent from the camp. Aśvatthāman strangles Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the slayer of his father, then, going from bed to bed, mercilessly kills all the warriors, including the five sons of Draupadī and Sikhandin. Demons come prowling to feast on the flesh of the slain. Duryodhana is still alive to hear that he has been avenged. Draupadī, maddened by sorrow, exacts the punishment of Aśvatthāman. Probably the early account of Aśvatthāman's punishment has been lost. What we read in the Mahābhārata is a recast of the original. Aśvatthāman being a Brāhmin is not killed but cursed by Kṛṣṇa to wander for three thousand years, shunned and rejected by all.

XI. *Strī-parvan:* The Section of the Women
(27 chapters; about 800 ślokas).

The five brothers meet Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī and the bereaved old couple receive them without bitterness. Then the ladies of the Kauravas visit the battle-field, and the old queen Gāndhārī, the mother of the hundred sons who have been slain, describes the horrible vision. Her sons are lying dead, in the midst of jackals and demons. Her daughters-in-law, dishevelled and frantic, are crying and lamenting near the corpses of their husbands. Then turning towards Kṛṣṇa, she blames him for not having prevented the slaughter and curses him. The funeral rites are performed and all the survivors retire to the bank of the Ganges.

* (This was probably the end of the great epic. The seven remaining Sections were added in the course of time.)

XII. *Śānti-parvan:* The Section of Peace

(365 chapters; about 14000 ślokas).

The true story of Karṇa's birth having been revealed, Yudhiṣṭhira decides to expiate his fratricide by retiring to the forest. He is dissuaded from doing so and is installed on the throne. Then Kṛṣṇa sets out with the five brothers to the battle-field where they find Bhīṣma, lying on his bed of arrows, and ready to instruct them. Follows an immense discourse of the dying hero. In brief, the discourse falls into three parts:

(1) *The duties of a king:* the four stages of life *(āśramas)*; the duties of the Kṣatrīyas; administration; war; general precepts.

(2) *Conduct in time of calamity:* Brāhmins must be protected at all cost; alliance with those who have similar interests; greed and ignorance to be avoided; the greatest virtue is self-control; discussion on the four aims of life: Vidura favours *dharma* (duty); Arjuna, *artha* (wealth); Bhīma, *kāmā* (passion); Yudhiṣṭhira, *mokṣa* (liberation).

(3) *Liberation:* its fundamental condition is *tyāga* or renunciation which consists in killing all desires; the origin of the world; life and death; good and evil; rules for daily life; the practice of *yoga* and of *japa* (ejaculatory prayer); greatness of Viṣṇu; concentration on the all-pervading Ātman; ahimsa or non-injury to all creatures; house-holder and saṁnyāsin; philosophical doctrine of Sāṁkhya and Yoga; the *Nārāyanīya:* extolling Nārāyaṇa as the Supreme Being.

(All this teaching is illustrated by numerous stories, fables and parables.)

XIII. *Anuśāsana-parvan:* The Section of Instruction

(168 chapters; about 8000 ślokas).

Bhīṣma goes on with his discourse. Various topics are touched upon: the law of Karma, the respect due to Brāhmins; marriage and inheritance; the sanctity of the cow; funeral rites, fasts and offerings; praise of Kṛṣṇa. After his long discourse, Bhīṣma announces the time of his death. In the presence of a great concourse of people, his spirit ascends to the skies. The funeral rites are performed.

N.B. Sections XII and XIII are obviously brāhmanical additions. Their connection with the epic is purely accidental. Their 22000 ślokas embody the teachings of several generations of brāhmanical lore. Although the general doctrine tends to extol Viṣṇu (Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa) as the Supreme Lord, there are important portions which expound shaivite tenets and celebrate the supreme lordship of Śiva (Mahādeva).

XIV. *Aśvamedha-parvan:* The Section of the Horse-Sacrifice

(92 chapters; about 3000 ślokas).

Yudhiṣṭhira is advised to perform the horse-sacrifice *(aṣvamedha)*. At the request of Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa summarises the teaching given in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

This summary is called the *Anugītā* and is divided into three parts: instruction given by a Siddha to a Brāhmin; instruction of a Brāhmin to his wife; instruction of a guru to his pupil. The widow of Abhimanyu, Uttarā, gives birth to a still-born child whom Kṛṣṇa restores to life and who is given the name of Parīkṣit. Preparations for the horse-sacrifice are begun. The horse is sent away and Arjuna is appointed to follow it and to conquer all the kingdoms to which the horse leads him. After one year, Arjuna returns with the horse and the sacrifice is performed in the presence of all the kings subdued by Arjuna. The Pāṇḍavas are cleansed of all their sins. (The last chapters of this section contain a discussion on the value of the sacrifice: it is not the offering that matters but the internal dispositions of the worshipper).

XV *Āśramvāsika-parvan:* The Section of Retirement to the Forest
(39 chapters; about 1100 ślokas).

For fifteen years, old king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his wife Gandharī live with their nephews. Then the old couple, accompanied by Kuntī, Vidura and Sanjaya, retire to the forest. The Pāṇḍavas visit them. Vidura dies and his spirit enters Yudhiṣṭhira. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gandharī and Kuntī obtain from Vyāsa the boon of seeing their dead relatives in the other world. After two years the news is brought to Yudhiṣṭhira that Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gandharī and Kuntī have died in a forest fire.

XVI. *Mausala-parvan:* The Section of the Club-Fight
(8 chapters; about 300 ślokas).

The curse of Gandharī finds its fulfilment: in a club-fight Kṛṣṇa's brother, Baladeva, is killed. Dejected, Kṛṣṇa lies down in a forest and is killed by a hunter.

XVII. *Mahāprasthanika-parvan:* The Section of the Great Departure
(3 chapters; about 100 ślokas).

The five brothers, leaving the affairs of the kingdom to Arjuna's grandson Parikṣit, the sole surviving heir of the Pāṇḍavas, take the garb of ascetics, move about the country and retire to Mount Meru, accompanied by Draupadī. They all die except Yudhiṣṭhira who refuses to enter heaven if his brothers and his dog are not there with him. His dog reveals itself to have been the god Dharma in disguise. Indra promises Yudhiṣṭhira that he will see his brothers and Draupadī in heaven.

XVIII. *Svargārohaṇa-parvan:* The Section of the Ascent to Heaven
(6 chapters; about 300 ślokas).

Yudhiṣṭhira, on reaching heaven, sees Duryodhana seated on a throne, but does not see his brothers and Draupadī. He asks to be led where they are. He is taken by the sinners' road to hell where the Pāṇḍavas are in torments, and decides to remain with them. Indra appears, reveals to him that all this was an illusion meant to test his steadfastness and takes him to heaven where he meets his brothers and Draupadī. It is revealed that Draupadī is an incarnation of the goddess Śrī (Prosperity) and that the other heroes of the story are incarnations of various deities.

Conclusion

The general opinion of scholars was that the Mahābhārata was originally the heroic tale of a hardy race of warriors and that their story of feudal rivalry and martial spirit was later exploited by teachers of various schools as a vehicle for the diffusion of their doctrines. In this way the human heroes were supposed to have been gradually given divine status, and the ancient epic to have been swollen with a mass of didactic materials.

Recent scholarship, however, has discovered that both the characters and the careers of the chief heroes reflect in astonishing details the traits and deeds of the gods whose sons or avatāras they are supposed to be. To divest them of those divine features would be tantamount to reducing them to non-descript puppets. Further, the mythology from which the heroes derive their individuality is not purāṇic but vedic and even pre-vedic. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that divine filiation or avatāra-status belong to the original Mahābhārata. One example among many is the terrible enmity between Arjuna and Karṇa which is a human replica of the hostility between Sūrya, the god of light and generosity, and Indra, the god of storms and clouds.

The ancient people who listened to the Mahābhārata were very much like the ancient Hebrews listening to the Old Testament. For these, Moses and Joshua were not mere human figures but men endowed with Yahweh's Spirit of power and authority. Like the Old Testament, the Mahābhārata is sacred history. In both cases, we can wonder what the superhuman heroes would become in the light of profane history, but this type of inquiry in no way warrants the assumption that such profane history was ever composed and there ever existed an "original" Old Testament or Mahābhārata in which the divine dimension of the heroes was absent. The divine dimension is original, even if, in the course of centuries, it may have been enriched with more vivid features.

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Chapter 21

The Bhagavadgītā

(*J. Neuner*)

Among the didactic passages inserted into the Mahābhārata, the most important is the Bhagavadgītā, often simply called the Gītā. It is contained in Book VI, chapters 25-42. However, the 18 *adhyāyas* (chapters) have long since formed a literary unit of their own. The Gītā is the best known book of India's religious literature. It is significant that it plays a role not only in India's strictly religious and philosophical schools but in its practical life as well. It became the inspiring force of the great leaders during the national struggle for freedom; it was Gandhi's companion during the years of his campaign and during the terms of his prison life. In 1929 he published his annotated Gītā-translation in Gujarati (later also in other Indian languages and English). He calls the book "unrivalled for its spiritual merits", and he undertakes the translation with the hope "that all Gujarati men and women wishing to shape their conduct according to their faith should digest and derive strength from the translation here presented". Even before Gandhi, Lokamanya Tilak had published his *Gītā Rahasya* (Secret of the Gītā) in 1910. He had found in the Gītā the message of freedom. In one of his stirring speeches he said: "The Bhagavadgītā tells you that this imperishable Ātma cannot be destroyed by weapons, nor can it be burnt by fire. What is called Ātma in religious philosophy is known as liberty in the science of politics. Ātma exists everywhere; it does not need to be reborn. Similarly the love of liberty exists in every heart, and I am only awakening you to the consciousness of its existence."[1] Leaving aside the question of whether or not the translation of the Gītā-doctrine into the political Gospel of Freedom is legitimate, Tilak's deep esteem for the Gītā shows that this work belongs neither to the documents of past times, nor to esoteric circles, but remains a living force in India's national life. It is the pride of India's religious literature and more than any other work embodies the soul of India.

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[1] D. V. Tahmankar, *Lokamanya Tilak*, p. 236.

Moreover, the Gītā is the best known work of Indian literature all over the world. In Europe it was first made known through C. Wilkins' English Translation (1785) and was spread mainly through A.W. Schlegel's critical edition and Latin translation (1823). Since W.Von Humbolt called it "perhaps the deepest and loftiest thing the world has to show," the praise of the Gītā never ceased.

A. The Origin of the Gītā

It is generally agreed among scholars that the Gītā is of a later origin than the bulk of the Mahābhārata. This is born out mainly by the position which Kṛṣṇa holds in the book. Whereas in the original Epos Kṛṣṇa is only one of the human heroes who fight on the side of the Pāṇḍavas to help them regain their kingdom, he appears in the Gītā as Bhagavān, embodying all the attributes of Ātman and Brahman. The Gītā may have been inserted into the Mahābhārata about the second century B.C.

However, there still remains the question whether the poem is the work of one author or the common product of different contributors. Orthodox Indian tradition holds firm to the oneness of authorship. Western scholars are divided. To every reader it is obvious that very different tendencies are embodied in the poem, doctrines of various schools and origins. Yet, Western scholarship also tends more and more to acknowledge that there is in it a unifying principle by which the various, sometimes conflicting, elements are bound together. Whereas Hopkins, seeing only the multiplicity of ideas contained in the Gītā, called it "an ill-assessed cabinet of primitive philosophical opinions", Hill extols the unifying idea of the devotion to Kṛṣṇa which brings all the elements into harmony: "Never did an author compose so widely comprehensive an eirenicon in a spirit of less compromise. He will not abate one jot of Kṛṣṇa's claim to be supreme, to be the all" *(The Bhagavadgītā*, p. 16). Special mention must be made of R. Otto's theory which holds that there is a nucleus of the Gītā, the *Ur-Gītā,* which belongs to the original Epos. It consists mainly of ch. I-II, 38; X, 1-8; XIII, 1-51; XVIII, 58-73. These texts fit into the action of the Epos as they narrate Arjuna's doubt whether or not to fight and so become guilty of the ruin of the family and of law and order; Kṛṣṇa's exhortation that Arjuna should carry out his duty because all human beings are only instruments in the fulfilment of God's eternal designs; and the great vision in which Kṛṣṇa is seen as the origin, abode and absorbing abyss of created beings. All the rest of the poem consists, according to R. Otto, of doctrinal treatises, eight in number, which represent various schools of thought. Besides, numerous glosses were added in later redactions, mainly in order to "immunise" the Gītā by "Brāhmanising" it, which means that the Gītā teachings that had originated outside the realm of orthodox traditions had to be brought closer to the doctrines of the accepted schools.

Whatever the value of such theories may be, they lead to the characteristics of the poem as a work of synthesis between the past and a new age, between various schools of thought and the vital impulses of a new religious movement.

B. The Background of the Gītā

The world of the Epics to which the Gītā belongs is marked first of all by new *sociological* conditions. The Vedic world had been essentially Brāhmanic. The entire universe was centred round the sacrificial fire and was said to depend on the ritual performances of the priests. We find such extreme remarks as the following: "Assuredly it (the sun) would not rise were he (the Brāhmin) not to make that offering (of the Agnihotram)." (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2, 3, 1, 5.)

In the social setting of the Epics, the Kṣatriyas, the warrior caste, occupy the centre. Vedic altars and schools of Brāhmanic learning are replaced by royal courts and battle-fields as stages for the human drama. The epoch is aristocratic. The priestly class has no influence on the affairs of the state.

Along with the new sociological structure, a new ethical outlook develops. The key-concept of doctrinal discourses is no longer *yajña* (sacrifice) but *dharma* (law and order). The central problem of ethics is the right way of acting, not the correct performance of ritual prescriptions. The Gītā contains verses of scathing criticism against the utilitarian practice of the Vedic ritual. Often the Brāhmins offered their services for the sake of the *dakṣinā*, the sacrificial fee, and the people who engaged the Brāhmins' services were themselves led by selfish interest to obtain the material goods which were expected from the sacrifice. The deeply religious composer of the Gītā abhors such cupidity because the aim of man's life is found not in selfish desires but beyond the sphere of the ever changing world:

> "A flowery speech there is fools utter; in the words of the Veda they rejoice and say, 'there is naught else!' Their soul is all desire, their goal is heaven (the transient state of happiness after death, before rebirth); they promise rebirth as fruit of work, and prescribe many varied rites that lead to joys and lordship. Not resolute nor fit for contemplation is the judgment of those who cling to joys and lordship, robbed by that speech of wit" (II, 42-44).

The Gītā intends to lead to the right way of acting: "In work the rightful interest should lie, not in its fruit" (II, 47).

It is therefore characteristic of the Gītā as belonging to the world of the Epos that the stage of the poem is the battlefield between the arrayed armies of the hostile brothers. The local indication of the first verse brings out the new situation: "*dharmakṣetre, kurukṣetre*"—"on the field of duty, on the Kuru-field." It indicates that the historical situation of the developing battle which was to be fought out on the Kuru-field (near Delhi) is at the same time the scene of the correct ethical decision which Arjuna has to make in the conflict of duties. We are far from the problems of ritualistic purity which occupied the writers of the Brāhmanas.

Connected with the new ethics is a new *religious* outlook. The age is marked by the development of new religious systems, Buddhism and Jainism, which had grown within the new social groups and away from the orthodox traditions. Besides, the Gītā takes account of new religious tendencies which could have introduced new divisions into India's religious schools. It is the genius of the composer of the Gītā that he attempts, and effectively establishes, contact with those newly arising doctrines and practices, and inserts them as a powerful leaven into the mass of Hinduism. This new religious inspiration of the Gītā had been developed in the religion of the Bhāgavatas which may be called the great religious lay-movement of the time, the cult of Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa.

The religion of the Bhāgavatas consisted in the worship of the one highest God, who is the source of all beings. Their religious practice was characterised by freedom from the complicated Vedic ritual and by a universality which allowed people of all castes, and even outcasts and women, to take part in the divine worship and promised salvation to them. Their attitude towards God was not knowledge, but loving devotion and praise expressed in hymns and simple offerings, as recorded in the Gītā:

> "If any earnest soul make offering to me with devotion, a leaf or flower or fruit or water, that offering of devotion I enjoy. Whatever work thou doest, whatever thou doest eat, whatever thou doest sacrifice or give, whatever be thine austere practice, do all as an offering to me" (IX, 26s).

In the Gītā Kṛṣṇa is the Highest God. How did he come to be elevated to such dignity? Kṛṣṇa was a rather common name, and it is quite possible that various historical figures have lent their features to the Kṛṣṇa of the Gītā and later mythology. The Kṛṣṇa of the Mahābhārata was probably one of the warriors who took part in the epic struggle of the Aryan immigration into India c. 1000 B.C. There is another Kṛṣṇa who receives instruction from Ghora Āṅgirasa in Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 3, 17. If he is identical with the hero of the Mahābhārata (as e.g., Barth and Hopkins think,) we would have to consider Kṛṣṇa as one of the warriors who learnt from a priest the spiritual meaning of the sacrifice, the merit of virtue and the importance of the last thoughts before death—ideas which have been further developed in the Gītā. That Kṛṣṇa was originally a deity, either a solar god of the Rajput clan, or a god of vegetation who would have slowly grown to the size of the universal god of the Gītā, is not proved and seems unlikely as we can trace the progress of the deification of the epic hero. In the second century this process of the divinisation of Kṛṣṇa is completed: he appears as the supreme god.

C. The Doctrine of Gītā

This, then, is the central religious idea of the Gītā: that Bhagavān, the highest God, is All and comprises all the perfections of the Upaniṣadic Ātman and Brahman. He is the origin of all beings; he demands supreme devotion and the dedication of all actions of man to him; he answers such devotion by liberating man from the wheel of rebirths and leads him to the highest goal.

This religious centre of the Gītā is not an isolated doctrine, put side by side with other systems of salvation. The composer of the

Gītā knows with sovereign vision how to re-orientate all current religious traditions and school-doctrines in accordance with the new religious outlook.

There is first *Śaṃkhya,* with the double principle of the changeable prakṛti (nature) and the immutable puruṣa (the spirit or conscious self). In the Gītā prakṛti is no longer independent. Kṛṣṇa calls the elements of prakṛti his "lower nature" (VII, 5), which means that nature also is pervaded by the divine being. But the Bhakta is concerned with God's "higher nature" which is "the principle of life" (ibid). Hence the dualism of Śaṃkhya is overbridged, and both principles, nature and spirit, are comprised in the same divine self. Further, *jñāna*, the way of salvation through knowledge, is commended by the Gītā but subordinated to devotion to the personal God. Even the old sacrifices of Vedic times are retained, yet no longer as means to obtain the desired goods, but rather as the expression of the complex relations of the universe in which man depends on gods, and gods on sacrifices, so that the wheel of the universe may turn on undisturbed. The Gītā repeats the basic Brāhmanic law:

> "With it (with sacrifice) support the Lords of Heaven, and let these Lords of Heaven support you; by mutual support shall ye obtain the highest good; for, by sacrifice supported, shall Heaven's Lords give you the food you crave; he who gives naught to them and yet consumes the food they give, is but a thief" (III, 11ss).

It is clear that here the "Lords of Heaven" are not the highest God, but only cosmic agencies which have their specific functions in the wheel of the universe. Vedic sacrifices, therefore, are not conceived by the Gītā as offerings to the Highest God, but as part of the mutual exchange and interrelation on which the world process is based. Vedic religion is thus subsumed under the larger, comprehensive world picture of the Gītā in which Bhagavān sets this world of ours rolling, but reserves a higher, transcendent destiny for man, viz., freedom from the entanglement of the world and unity with the highest God. The passage concludes with the exhortation:

> "Therefore, without attachment ever perform the work that thou must do; for if without attachment a man works, he gains the highest" (III, 19).

Yoga, too, is entirely orientated anew in the Gītā. Originally Yoga had been individualistic and centred on the emancipation of the individual puruṣa from the limitations of the empirical world. The central teaching of Yoga, namely, single-minded effort for emancipation, is acknowledged by the Gītā, but the aim of the human effort is exclusively God: "Holding all these (senses, etc.) in check, let him sit, controlled, intent on me" (II, 61). From this first Bhakti-text onwards, the idea of Bhagavān as the centre of all intentions, efforts and actions becomes the ever more dominating theme of the Gītā.

Therefore, the *central teaching* of the Gītā must be found in those texts in which the surrender to God finds its purest expression, namely, in chs. VII, VIII, IX, XII. There we find such Bhakti texts as the following:

> "Those who have cast off all thoughts on me, and, making me their goal, meditate on me and worship me with undivided control; soon I will lift them up from the ocean of the mortal round, for their thoughts are fixed on me. On me set thy mind; on me let thy reason dwell; in me shalt thou dwell hereafter; there is no doubt" (XII, 6-8).

D. The Argument of the Gītā

How the teachings of the various schools are inserted into the Gītā and subordinated to its central doctrine can best be seen from a short survey of its 18 chapters (cf. Hill, *Bhagavadgītā*, p. 55ss.)

I. Arjuna, one of the five Pāṇḍava brothers who fight for the restoration of their rights against the Kaurava usurpers, finds himself between the two armies which are arrayed for the battle. He realises that from this feud between relatives no good can come. He pours out his desolation before Kṛṣṇa and then "sits down upon the chariot seat, dropping his arrows and bow, his soul overwhelmed with grief" (47).

II. Kṛṣṇa exhorts Arjuna not to yield to cowardice, but Arjuna once more states the reasons for his refusal to fight. He cannot see any meaning in this self-extinction of the family. He ends: "I will not fight" (9). — Kṛṣṇa begins to explain in Śaṃkhya terms the distinction between the perishable body which acts, suffers and dies, and the imperishable self which remains untouched by all exterior events or actions. "That cannot be destroyed whereby all this is pervaded" (7). "He who thinks of him as slayer, he who deems him slain — these both are void of judgement; he does not slay, nor is he slain" (19). He then turns to Yoga: In contrast to entanglement in worldly desires, as it is found in the Vedic religion, Arjuna must learn perfect detachment: "That man who puts off all desires, and walks without longing, knowing that 'Mine' and 'I' are naught, he comes to peace" (71).

III. Arjuna asks why, then, if man ought to be detached from all activity, he should still act: "Why dost thou set me to do a work of violence?" (1). Kṛṣṇa answers that work is inevitable as long as man is embodied. The law of work pervades the universe, it is enshrined in nature, and the wise men of the past gave the example of work. God himself continuously works though he does not gain in any way by action. Yet work must be done not for selfish motives, but for God: "Cast off all works on me" (3). Bondage is caused only by desire and passion, not by work as such.

IV. The explanation of work is continued. Kṛṣṇa discloses himself as avatāra, who already in olden times taught the Yoga-doctrine. He is the source of caste order by which each man receives his specific task. Right knowledge is the basis of right work. "Him whose work is with control renounced, him whose doubt has been by knowledge cleft, a man possessing the Ātman, works do not bind. Therefore, with the Ātman's sword of knowledge cleave thou this doubt, the child of ignorance, abiding in thy heart! Enter upon thy duty with control! Arise, O Bhārata!" (41ss).

V. What should be preferred, work or renouncement (*saṁnyāsa*)? They are not opposed to each other. The mental and bodily faculties must do work; the self remains motionless. The perfect ascetic is described: "A man should not rejoice at his gaining what he loves, nor grieve at gaining what he does not love, steadfast in judgment, undeluded, knowing Brāhman, in Brāhman abiding" (20). Yet again the ascetical ideal is centred in the Lord: "He who knows that it is I to whom sacrifices and austerities are directed, I, the great Lord of all the worlds and the friend of every being, he attains peace" (29).

VI. The process of gaining control over attachments is described. Again the picture of the yogin is outlined: command over senses and mind, steadiness of concentration, equanimity of the soul must be attained. God is the aim of these ascetical efforts: "Who sees me everywhere and everything in me, I am not lost to him, and he is not lost to me" (30). The question about the fate of those who fail in their efforts for self-control is answered by the doctrine of rebirth, which finally leads to perfection: "He who through many births has won perfection goes thence on the highest way" (45). The ideal of the yogin is perfected in the love of God: "Of all yogins him who with faith devoutly worships me, whose inmost self is lost in me, I hold to be the most controlled (*yuktatama*)" (47).

VII. The explanation of Bhakti in the stricter sense begins: "Hear how thou shalt without doubt know me fully, if thy mind be attached to me, if thou practise Yoga, if thou rely on me"(1). The basic requirement of Bhakti is the correct knowledge of God. Everything is comprised in God: the universe is the unfolding of his lower nature, which is qualified by the three *guṇas* (qualities) of prakṛti (nature). God himself stands above nature so that Kṛṣṇa defines his relation to the visible things "I am not in them, they are in me" (12). By such knowledge man comes to God: "To the man of knowledge I am exceedingly dear, and he is dear to me" (17).

VIII. Bhakti leads to final release after death. "He who at the last hour, leaving his body, goes hence, remembering me, comes to my being" (5). "For him who comes to me, there is no rebirth" (16). Worlds are coming and going, creatures are born and perish, but there is God's everlasting existence: "This, when all beings perish, does not perish" (20). "When men win this, they do not return; that is my highest dwelling place" (21).

IX. The ninth chapter is introduced as the most secret knowledge (*guhyatamam*) (1) and as royal science *(rājavidyā)* (2). God's indwelling in all beings and yet transcendence is described: "Sustainer of all beings, yet not dwelling in beings, is my Self that brings into existence" (5). God is operative in all the elements: "I am the way, the sustainer, the lord, the witness, the dwelling, the refuge, the friend, the origin, the dissolution, the resting place, the treasure house, the seed immutable" (18). Kṛṣṇa is present also in Devas and Bhūtas: "Even those who are devoted to the Lords of Heaven and sacrifice to them, possessed of faith even they do sacrifice to me alone, but not as law ordains. To the Lords of Heaven go they who pay their vows to Heaven's Lords. To me do they go who sacrifice to me" (23-25). Therefore, Kṛṣṇa alone should be worshipped in perfect devotion: "On me thy mind, to me thy devotion, for me thy sacrifice; to me do reverence! Thus holding thyself in control, and making me thine aim, even to me shalt thou come" (34).

X. Whatever ancient religious traditions contain, what sacred rites try to express, what inspires awe and majesty, — all that is Kṛṣṇa. The chapter is a magnificent display of the rich varieties of Hindu religious traditions in which each superlative is referred to Kṛṣṇa: "Of Sun-Spirits I am Viṣṇu, of lights the radiant sun, of Storm-Spirits I am Marīci, of the lights of night the Moon" (21).

XI. The great vision of Kṛṣṇa in his cosmic form is the climax of the Gītā. Whatever Arjuna has heard so far by way of theoretical explanation becomes now a grandiose vision. Kṛṣṇa is no longer Arjuna's companion in human form. In order to be able to see Kṛṣṇa's "power as Lord", he is given an "eye divine" (8). He beholds Kṛṣṇa's divine body with many mouths, eyes, and arms. It contains all gods and creatures. He sees the human beings, destined to death, enter the fearful, all-devouring mouths: "As many river torrents flow to meet the sea, so do these heroes of the world of men enter thy flaming mouths" (28). Kṛṣṇa explains: "I am all-devouring time that causes the world to perish, and I come forth to destroy the worlds: even apart from thee, not one of the warriors drawn up in ranks opposing shall survive. Therefore, arise, win glory, defeat thy foes, enjoy wise sovereignty! I have already slain these men; be thou no more than a means!" (32ss.) Arjuna is overawed by the vision, and now his delusion is gone. He knows that he has only to fulfil on an earthly plane what God himself is doing in eternal designs. "Now I have seen what none has seen before: I am delighted, though my heart quakes with fear" (45). Kṛṣṇa appears again in his ordinary human form.

XII. R. Otto calls this chapter "a manual of Bhakti-theology". Compared with the way of contemplation, Bhakti is an easier and faster way to the goal:

"Those who have cast off all works on me, and, making me their goal, meditate on me and worship me with undivided control — soon will I lift them up from the ocean of the mortal round" (6). The equilibrium of the Bhakta's mind is described in detail: "He who holds both blame and praise in equal balance, silent, content with any lot, homeless, of judgment sure — that man is dear to me, my worshipper devout" (19).

XIII. With this chapter begins a new portion of the Gītā, which some consider a later addition. The following sections give more the impression of additional treatises. Under the terms 'field' (*kṣetra*) and 'knower of the field' (*kṣetrajña*), chapter XIII describes the way of proper discrimination according to a scheme of popularised Śaṁkhya. There are only a few Bhakti references.

XIV. Another Śāṁkhya exposition follows based on the doctrine of the three guṇas (qualities) which characterise nature: *sattva* (purity and lucidity), *rajas* (energy and passion) and *tamas* (darkness and indolence). Man must conform all his actions to the sattva element. However, to attain salvation he must cross beyond the three guṇas which belong to the sphere of the body. It is through Bhakti that the guṇas, are crossed: "He who with unwavering practice of devotion does me service has crossed beyond these guṇas" (26).

XV. Śāṁkhya doctrine is continued: the world is compared to a tree growing from above downwards, having its roots in the highest Brāhman. To attain salvation man must cut the root of worldly existence with the axe of detachment. He must strive to rise above the delusions of the world to the supreme Person (*puruṣottama*), to Kṛṣṇa.

XVI. The moral doctrine of right behaviour is developed according to the antique contrast *deva-asura,* i.e., lucid and demonic nature.

XVII. Similar moral teachings are imparted according to the system of the three guṇas: sattva, rajas, tamas. All actions, religious or worldly, can be done with the prevalence of one of the guṇas, and accordingly have high or low moral value, or none at all.

XVIII. The doctrine of the three guṇas is applied to detachment, work, reason, constancy, pleasure, each of which can be of three types. The caste system too is based on the prevalence of one of the three guṇas in each of them. The concluding portion (50ss) sums up once more the main teachings of the Gītā as the way of inner freedom which culminates in total self-abandonment to God.

Conclusion

This survey gives only the main topics of the Gītā, leaving out most details. Even so, it is understandable that the Gītā has given rise to most contradictory interpretations. The fact that the author inserts into the poem expositions of the traditional doctrines gave the different schools an opportunity to consider the Gītā as a text of their own school conceiving their respective teachings as central and the rest as subordinate and accessory. Thus the Advaita insertions made Śaṅkara, and many with him, think that the Gītā intends to teach the *jñāna marga*, the way of salvation through knowledge, with Bhakti only a prominent means to attain knowledge. Of Tilak's dynamic interpretation we have already made mention. Each theory has found ready-made arguments for its own interpretation in selected texts. However, more and more scholars agree that the truly central theme of the Gītā is Bhakti, that the author is entirely imbued with its spirit, and, being a universal mind with a strong sense of tradition, inserts and subordinates the tenets of other schools under the dominating theme of devotion to a personal God. This strong sense of universal Indian tradition, rooted in a deeply religious mind, expressed in terms of soberness and wise balance, is the reason why the Gītā became the most important work of India's religious literature.

On account of apparent parallels, the theory was proposed that the Gītā was influenced by Christian sources, or vice versa. Such ideas have largely been given up. The Gītā can be understood from its own context and from Indian tradition. However, a few remarks of *comparison* between the Gītā and Christian doctrine may be useful.

The Christian reader of the Gītā will be deeply moved by the devotion to, and love of, God which pervade the poem. But his appreciation will not prevent him from seeing the basic differences from the Christian belief. There is first the *teacher of the message.* In Christianity, Christ is the centre of revelation. He saves man through his true human life, passion, death and resurrection. Christ's real entering into our history, his deeds and words constitute the essence of Christianity. In the Gītā Kṛṣṇa speaks. He too reveals himself as the centre of the world and the source of salvation. But we cannot forget that the Kṛṣṇa of the Gītā is a literary fiction. The Kṛṣṇa of history was one of the heroes of the epic war who was slowly divinised. In his divinised figure all the lofty aspirations of India's religious mind are embodied, and so the discourses of the Gītā have inspired thousands to a deeper love of God. But all this cannot make up for the fact that, historically speaking, Kṛṣṇa never uttered those words on Kurukṣetra attributed to him by the Gītā.

The sublime doctrine of the Gītā stresses Kṛṣṇa's transcendence over the world of created beings. Yet there is no clear concept of *creation*, and there is no sovereign freedom of God in relation to the universe. The world moves by necessity, and it moves forever. There is no beginning when God, through the word of creation, calls the creatures into existence, nor is there a final aim of human history when the world process comes to the end for which it is destined. Christian doctrine, on the other hand, teaches the free creation of the world and its fulfilment in the end of time.

The meaning of work consists, according to the Gītā, in obedience to God, who wishes the world to move on its necessary course. Such obedience results in the *salvation* of those who work with detachment. Salvation means that they escape the wheel of the world and, after passing through their period of embodiment, attain their goal beyond the sphere of matter. Christian doctrine teaches that man's work must be integrated into God's Kingdom. This Kingdom is visibly present in the sphere of history. It is this world of ours that must be saved. Man's final fulfilment does not consist in his definite separation from body and world, but in the resurrection of the body and the renovation of heaven and earth.

Though the Gītā knows well the need for divine help in man's struggle for salvation, it still does not conceive grace as an inner renovation of man by God's creative power. Man's spiritual nature, his innermost self, is never changed. In unenlightened man this self is covered by the veil of delusion; in enlightened man the veil is removed. Devotion to Kṛṣṇa is the most powerful help in removing this veil; Kṛṣṇa himself supports man's efforts in removing it. But never does Kṛṣṇa make of sinful man a son of God, renewing his heart and making him share, through his free gift, in divine life. In salvation according to the Gītā, man only discovers what he has been forever; he is not raised to a new level of being.

It is good to be aware of such and similar basic differences between the Gītā doctrine (and Hinduism in general) and Christianity. No one will profit from confusing doctrines. Still, we should not stop at pointing out differences but should, when reading the lofty passages of Gītā, feel an intimate closeness to all those who love God. Those who are able to pray in the words of the Gītā are certainly touched by the grace of God and have set out, in deep earnestness and resolve, on the path of the greatest deed man can do, his surrender to God.

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Chapter 22

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Great Bhakti currents

(*P. Fallon*)

The ignorant say that Love and God are different;
None know that Love and God are the same,
When they know that Love and God are the same,
They rest in God's Love. (Tiru-Mūlar, a
Śaiva mystic of the Middle-Ages.)

According to a leading historian of Indian Philosophy, "the Bhāgavata Purāṇa shares with the Bhagavad-Gītā a unique position in the devotional literature of India." Legend and popular belief attribute its authorship to the same Mahārshi Veda Vyāsa who composed the Mahābhārata; Vyāsa, having there treated somewhat summarily the most important and salutary doctrine of *bhakti*, would have wished to complete his work and give mankind a full exposition of the *bhaktimārga*. In fact, many centuries separate these two great works, and most probably, the Bh. P. was not written before the 9th or 10th century A.D.; it gathered into a mighty synthesis, a true mediaeval '*summa*', all the different acquisitions of Hindu thought and devotion during the long period which followed the Gītā and saw the gradual disintegration of Buddhism, the rise of Paurāṇic Hinduism, the preaching of Advaita Vedānta by Śaṅkara and the gradual integration within orthodox brāhmanism of many Dravidian and other non-Aryan cults, devotions and myths. The Bh. P. is a bulky and learned work: 18,000 ślokas in a beautiful but rather high-flown and difficult Sanskrit, 12 parts (*skandhas*) divided into chapters (more than 320 chapters in all, 90 of these forming the famous tenth *skandha*), long disquisitions on the Vedānta and Śaṃkhya, the story of all the avatāras of Viṣṇu (the number of these avatāras having considerably increased since the days of the Mahābhārata), including of course the life and exploits of Rāma, many devotional tales from the Paurāṇic tradition (Prahlāda, Dhruva, Hariścandra, etc.), and, dominating all this maze of stories and discourses, a lofty doctrinal exposition of the *bhakti* way of salvation and, in the tenth *skandha*, the story of Bhagavān Vāsudeva, Śrikṛṣṇa, with all the disconcerting and, at times, dubious anthropomorphisms of its mythical imagery.

Probably composed in South-India by a poet who had inherited the ardent devotion of the 'Tamil Saints', the Bhāgavata soon captivated the hearts of many all over India. It has become the leading religious authority for the Vaishṇavas; it has been commented upon by some of the greatest theologians of mediaeval India (Madhva, Vallabha, Jīva Gosvāmī, etc.) and translated into most Indian vernaculars. The tenth book, in particular, has been translated again and again; in Bengali, there have been at least 40 such translations during the Middle-Ages. Innumerable songs and plays, pictures, statues, romances, dances and popular festivals have made the Hindu masses familiar with the contents of the Bhāgavata. Nearly all the great bhaktas, the saints of Mahārāṣṭra, those of Karṇāṭak, in the North Mīrābai, Sūradāsa and to some extent Tulasīdāsa, in Western India Vidyāpati, Caṇdīdāsa, Caitanya and many more, have been deeply influenced by the teachings of the Bhāgavata. The living religion of the Hindu masses is found, better perhaps than in any other text, in this Purāṇa, with its nearly infinite variety, and that strange admixture of the sublimest metaphysical non-dualism and the devout fancies, the warmly sensuous symbolism, the idolatrous aberrations of popular imagination. To this day, in all parts of India, millions think of God and devoutly worship Him as the flute-playing Gopāla of Vṛndāvana; and for those whose devotion addresses itself to Rāma or to some other name of the deity, their *bhakti*, whatever its particular object, is generally similar to that described in those beautiful aphorisms of the Bhāgavata which Viṣṇupuri once collected into his '*Bhaktiratnāvalī* (The Necklace of Devotional Gems).

A. Bhakti before the Bhāgavata

If by *bhakti* we mean loving devotion, desire of intimate communion and surrender, confident prayer to a divine Person, it is certain that some degree at least of *bhakti* will be found in any manifestation of sincere and genuine religious sentiment. In some hymns of the Veda (hymns to Varuṇa, Savitā, Uṣas, etc.), one finds expressions of real piety and personal devotion; yet the Vedic religion seems to have been, on the whole, too ritualistic or too much restricted within the limits of nature worship and animism to satisfy the deeper aspirations of the Indian masses. The Upaniṣads emphasised more the importance of speculative mysticism than that of devotion and surrender to Grace; the later Upaniṣads, however, (the *Śvetāśvatara, Kaṭha*, etc.) gave much more attention to the role of bhakti in spiritual life, God's grace being assigned the primary place and the personal 'I-Thou' relationship being given a greater value than mere knowledge.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the greatest 'Upaniṣad,' teaches the salvific nature of true *bhakti*; the Mahābhārata hero, Śri Kṛṣṇa, becomes a transcendent being, the object of devotion and adoring surrender, the supreme dispenser of grace and salvation. The *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the Mahābhārata similarly teaches the doctrine of bhakti and the absolute need of God's grace to become enlightened and see Nārāyaṇa. With the beginning of the Christian era, *bhakti* gains more and more ground.

By this time, all through India, in different religious contexts, bhakti has come to assume a preponderant importance. Even the Buddhists are won over to these doctrines; the '*Lalita-Vistāra*' the '*Sad-dharma-puṇḍarīka*' and Aśvaghosa's '*Buddha-carita*' present to us a new Buddhism, penetrated with sentiments of loving devotion, the Buddha of these texts often merely substituting for Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa. New Hindu Scriptures, ranked by many as high as the Vedas, come to find wide acceptance: the *Āgamas* and the *Tantras* completely renew ceremonies and cultural symbols. Orientated either toward Śiva or toward Viṣṇu the two great non-Aryan deities, ancient doctrines and devotions now emerge and reach the level of Brāhminic recognition. The '*pūjā*' form of worship gradually replaces the Vedic '*yajña*' rite of sacrifice; a much more intimate and personal relation is established between the worshipper and the object of his adoration or contemplation.

B. Śiva Bhakti and Śaiva Saints

All *bhakti* is not vaishṇava; Śiva, in south India more especially, has been the object of deep and loving devotion.

That day Thou owned me,
That very day, O Lord, firm as rock!
Hast Thou not made Thine own, my life, body and all?
Is there any misery for me today, my Lord?
Thou mayest cause pleasure or pain;
Am I to question Thee? (transl. by S. Bharati; cited in *"Temple Bells"*.

The author of this prayer is Māṇikka Vācagar, the Tamil saint whose great work '*Tiruvācagam*' is said to have been "the fountainhead of all later devotional poetry in the Tamil land". Natarāja, the dancing Śiva, was for him the Lord and Saviour.

Śiva-devotion can be traced back to very early times. The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* exalts Śiva as much as the Gītā does Kṛṣṇa; later samhitās and purāṇas will only develop this theistic Śaiva doctrine and devotion. Already flourishing under the Guptas in the North and the Pallavas in the South, Śaivism knew still greater development under the great Cola kings; the *Pāśupatas*, (i.e., the devotees of Śiva, the Lord or '*Pati*' of all creatures or '*paśus*') spread to the Eastern Archipelago and the hinduised states of Greater India.

Four great bhaktas, among many other Śaiva *siddhas* (*saints*), have been the main singers of Śiva-bhakti in South-India; they are to this day venerated in thousands of temples and their hymns are sung throughout the Tamil land. They are the four Ācāryas (or Samāyacāryas) who taught the various ways of *cārya* (the *dāsamārga* or path of the servant), *kṛiya* (the *satputramārga* or path of the good son), *yoga* (the *sahamārga* or path of the friend) and *jñāna* (the *sat-mārga* or path of truth and goodness). *Appar, Sambandar, Sundara and Māṇikka Vācagar,* the four bhakti 'doctors', lived in the 7th and 8th centuries. About Māṇikka J.E. Carpenter writes:

> The poet's theme is the wonder of divine Grace shown forth in his own life, and he tells without reserve the marvel of his first conversion, his joy and exaltation, his subsequent waywardness, his despondencies, his falls, his shame, and his final recovery and triumph. Dr Pope compares the influences of these verses in shaping the religious life of the Tamils of South-India to that of the Psalms in the Christian Church. They are daily sung throughout the country with tears of rapture.

Śaivism had to struggle with Jainism and Buddhism but gradually supplanted them almost entirely. More will be said in a later chapter about the doctrines of South Indian Śaivism, but it was necessary to speak here of those Śiva-bhakti currents and to draw attention to those Śaiva *padigams* (hymns). A last quotation may help to understand the nature of this ardent devotion:

> Caught in the circling sea of joyous life,...busied in earth, I acted many a lie.. He laid his hand on me.. The One most precious Infinite to earth came down.. My inmost self in strong desire dissolved, I yearned; Love's river overflowed its banks; my senses all in him were centred; 'Lord', I cried, with stammering speech and quivering frame; I clasped adoring hands, my heart expanding like a flower (Māṇikka V.).

The hymns of Appar, Sambandar and Sundara have been gathered into one collection called the *Devārām*; together with the *Tiruvācagam*, this work embodies a very lofty and ardent bhakti-tradition still alive today in South-India.

There have been many more Śaiva mystics and poets who sang the love of Śiva: Nandanār, Auvai (a holy woman whose verses are still taught after a thousand years in Tamil schools), Meykāṇḍar; nearer to us, Aruṇagiri, Tāyumanawar, Rāmaliṅga, etc.

C. Vaiṣṇava Bhakti in Tamil Nād

Bhāgavatism, the religion of faith and devotion having as its chief object Bhagavān Vāsudeva, otherwise called Kṛṣṇa and identified with Viṣṇu or Hari, (soon identified as well with Nārāyaṇa), exercised a great influence over the Tamil country. The devotional songs of the *Āḷvārs*, constituting the Vaiṣṇava *Prabandham* (4000 verses of classical Tamil), sing the praises of Kṛṣṇa and Nārāyaṇa; the *bhakti* expressed in these hymns is deeply emotional. These *Āḷvārs*, twelve according to tradition, lived between the sixth and the ninth centuries. The Śri Vaiṣṇavas attach to the *Nālāyira Prabandham* (literally, the collection of 4000 songs) an importance as great as to the Vedas. Among these hymns, those of *Nāmmāḷvār*, more than all others, have influenced the faith and devotion of the southern Vaiṣṇavas. According to Professor V. Rangacharya, "possessing a matchless cadence and simple grandeur, they are characterised equally by their literary charm and by their ethical and spiritual values. To the emotionally inclined, the psalms are simple and appealing prayers to the different local arcāvatāras of Viṣṇu. To the less emotional and more philosophical, they seem to be the outcome of great learning in the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Vedānta, the Gītā, and the Bhāgavata literature. To the practical spiritualist, they are of value as the achievement of one who was in holy communion with God."

> The surgeon cuts with the knife and burns,
> Yet the patient loves him!
> Even, so, my Lord, though endless pains afflict me,
> I will not cease to look for Thy mercy! *(Nāmmāḷvār)*

Another famous Tamil saint was the woman-devotee Āṇḍāl who chose to remain a virgin and led the life of a gopi enamoured of Kṛṣṇa, imagining herself to be the bride of Raṇganātha (Kṛṣṇa), the Lord of Śrīrańgam. Āṇḍāl, Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa's bride, was later considered as being herself an avatāra of Lakṣmī.

The devotion of the Āḷvārs, centred on Viṣṇu, is monotheistic; it calls for absolute loving surrender to the Lord who, though supreme and transcendent, makes himself accessible to his devotees, especially in his avatāra, Kṛṣṇa, the friend of the cowherds of Vṛndāvana. The exploits and pranks of the child Kṛṣṇa are sung with emotion; the images of Viṣṇu are worshipped with great devotion.

Together with this popular growth of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti in the South, we find also a considerable development of Sanskrit bhakti-literature. The *Pāñcarātra Samhitās*, an immense body of philosophical and ritual texts in which non-Aryan and Tantrika influences are clearly discernible, and several new purāṇas came to be composed during these same centuries that witnessed the bhakti-preaching of the Tamil Āḷvārs. The *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* is one of the most remarkable purāṇas; it contains the detailed story of cowherd Kṛṣṇa, as also very sublime teachings on God's transcendence and grace. (The story of Prahlāda, as told in the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, has remained to this day one of the most inspiring themes exploited by all preachers of selfless and heroic *bhakti*. Prahlāda, the son of a 'pagan' king, has been taught the doctrine of *bhakti* and faces persecutions and death with loving trust in the name of Viṣṇu. — This story is often the theme of popular mystery-plays.)

The *Harivaṃśa*, a celebrated poem constituting a relatively modern addition to the Mahābhārata, a long work of some 16,000 verses, gives us a detailed biography of Kṛṣṇa, adding to the episodes described by the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* new stories about Kṛṣṇa's dalliances with the gopis of Vṛndāvana.

D. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa

King Parīkṣit, the grandson of Arjuna, was, on account of a hermit's curse, bitten by a deadly snake and, as he lay dying, he wished to fix his thoughts on Viṣṇu. Śuka, the son of Vyāsa, narrated the Bhāgavata to the dying king. The whole Purāṇa is dedicated to the glorification of Viṣṇu (Hari, Vāsudeva) and Viṣṇu-bhakti is propounded all through the poem.

The opening verse of the Bhāgavata and innumerable verses in various sections of the work emphasise the absolute simplicity and the transcendence of God whose true nature is pure consciousness and who is devoid of all duality and all distinctions. In this respect, the author of the Bh.P. appears to be a disciple of the purest Vedāntins, perhaps of Śaṅkara himself. This lofty conception of the Brāhman-Paramātman-Parameśvara makes the Bhāgavata *bhakti* very great and genuinely theistic even though a somewhat too emotional anthropomorphism often seriously compromises its purity.

But the Bh.P., though replete with metaphysical and theological speculation, advocates the *bhakti-yoga:*

Na dānam, na tapo, na ijyā, na śaucam, na vratāni ca
Prīyate (a) **malāyabhaktyā** *Harir; anyad viḍambanam.* (Bh.p.,7, 7, 52)
(Neither charities, austerities, sacrifices, purificatory rites or religious observances will do: Hari is pleased with pure bhakti. Anything else is futile!)

Tat karma, Hari-toṣam yat; sā vidyā, tan-matir yayā. (Ibid., 4, 29, 49)
(True work is that which pleases Hari; true learning is that by means of which the mind becomes fixed on Him.)

Sādhavo hṛdayam mahyam, sādhūnām hṛdayam tu-aham;
Mad anyat te na jānanti, na-aham tebhyo manāg-api. (Ibid., 9, 4, 68)
(The saints are my heart but I am the heart of the saints;
Anything but myself they know not, nor do I know anything
at all but them.)

This *bhakti* has as its chief object Kṛṣṇa; after all the other avatāras have been enumerated, when in the very first book, Kṛṣṇa's name is pronounced, the Bhāgavata has this phrase which, in course of time, became the *mahāvākya* (great saying) of the Kṛṣṇa-bhaktas:

Kṛṣṇas-tu Bhagavān svayam. (1, 3, 28)
(As for Kṛṣṇa, He is the Lord Himself.)

In fact, that part of the Purāṇa which, building largely on the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Harivaṃśa*, tells the 'marvellous' deeds of Kṛṣṇa, has become very popular, more so than any other part of the book.

From the very moment of his birth, the son of Vāsudeva and Devakī, Kṛṣṇa, reveals his identity with Hari (Viṣṇu): his four arms holding the traditional emblems of Viṣṇu, his jewels, crown and vestments, and the long speech the newly-born baby delivers to his parents leave no doubt about his supra-human nature. To save him from the wiles of his uncle King Kaṃsa, the child is smuggled out of the jail cell where he was born and entrusted to two inhabitants of Vṛaja, Nanda and Yaśodā, who will educate him as their own son. A succession of wonderful happenings, this life of the little Gopāla! He kills the ogress Pūtanā who, disguised, was suckling him; together with his elder brother, Balarāma, and his other cowherd friends, he has extraordinary adventures, first in Vṛaja, then in Vṛndāvana where his foster-parents have removed him for reasons of security. Many frightful demons and ogres, and Kaṃsa himself are killed by the child Kṛṣṇa; a great snake, Kāliya, is vanquished by him, after a long struggle in the waters of the Jumna. Pranks also, some of them of a doubtful symbolism: the children steal the clothes of the gopīs while these are bathing! (This apparently to teach us that all shame and human respect must be put aside in our approach to Kṛṣṇa.) The women of Vṛndāvana grow more and more enamoured of the child; this again is both 'marvellous' and, at least, puzzling. Kṛṣṇa is a child of eight years but the gopīs love him with a love which is neither motherly nor sisterly and not always consciously directed to the deity in him: the poet evidently wishes to symbolise in this manner the ardent *bhakti* the souls of men should have towards God, but the story is at times told with so much realism that the symbolic meaning is somewhat obscured. The *Rāsa-līlā*, the love-dance during which Kṛṣṇa, assuming a thousand bodies, plays with all the gopīs and showers his love upon each and every one, is the highest point of this tenth book; the *Rāsa* has become the most popular feast of many Kṛṣṇa-bhaktas. Symbolism evidently; yet, more is meant than mere literary symbolism: there *has* been a 'play', a real play, the chief actor of which was Kṛṣṇa himself; the gopīs of Vṛndāvana joined in this *līlā*, and the 'sports' of the boy Kṛṣṇa, for being symbolical, were none the less real. Kṛṣṇa, the eight-year boy who marvellously killed demons, held a mountain in his hands and protected from the fury of the rain-god Indra his friends the cowherds, similarly *played* this *rāsa-līlā:* There is a constant passage from assumed childhood to assumed manhood, all being the display of his supra-human nature! After these exploits, where we are never quite certain (and the actual personages of the Purāṇa do not seem either to have at all times been quite certain) whether Kṛṣṇa is a marvellous child or a grown-up man already, adorable or simply desirable, divine spirit enacting a symbolic play or man of flesh-and-blood, Kṛṣṇa and his brother Balarāma leave Vṛndāvana and go to school! New demons and giants are encountered, new feasts, new displays! Then, the rather longish story of Kṛṣṇa's marriages (with Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā, etc.), his struggles, his journey to Dvārakā, his death. All these stories are interspersed with bhakti hymns and bhakti principles, the stories being often a mere occasion for didactic developments very superior in value to the stories themselves. An atmosphere of emotional, ardent, at times erotic, strongly anthropomorphic love and devotion towards a person who is both charming and disconcerting, marvellous and supra-human but, at times, shockingly close to our profanest dreams. A great book which resembles some of those South-Indian gopurams with their extraordinary variety and richness of symbols and images, the divine and the human strangely mixed and, at times, confused.

E. Rāma Bhakti

The hero of the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāmacandra, became the chief object and the centre of a full-fledged religion in comparatively later times. But this Rāma-bhakti blossomed out into some of the purest and most beautiful flowers of devotion Hinduism ever produced. Tulasīdāsa's love and piety mark one of the high-points of Hindu spirituality.

> "The worship of the Impersonal laid no hold upon my heart. Tell me how to worship the Incarnate" (Tulasīdāsa, *Rāmacaritamānasa*, 7, 108). "There is one God, the Uncreated, the Universal Soul, the Supreme Spirit, the All-pervading, who has become incarnate and done many things for the love that he bears to his faithful people, All-gracious and compassionate to the humble, All-good, All-powerful" (*Ibid*., 1, 17).

The bhakti-current which led to *Tulasīdāsa* in the 16th century had reached Northern India thanks chiefly to the preachings of *Rāmānanda*. He belonged to the 14th century. With the ascendancy of Muslim rule, the Hindu religion had lost its royal patronage and had retired into Brāhmanical orthodoxy to the neglect of the common people. It is during these times of depression and moral uncertainties that saints (*sant*) emerged from the common classes throughout India but specially in the North. Through their simple poems (*santabāni)* composed in the vernacular Hindi, Marathi, etc., they opened to all the "pathway to God" and ennobling their conduct. The sants belonged to different castes, often from trading or even cobblers communities. Originally simple inspirers, followers turned them gradually into *gurus.*

Rāmānanda, a follower of Rāmānuja, travelled throughout North-India with a small band of men from diverse castes. He probably brought with him the *Ādhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa,* the 'Gītā' of the Rāmābhaktas, and had a decisive influence, direct or indirect, upon a number of bhakti-movements: *Kabīr, Nānak, Dādu, Ravidāsa* and *Tulasīdāsa* owed the best of their inspiration to him or to his followers. Kabīr and Tulasīdāsa have taught *bhakti* to the whole of Northern India, where the name of Rāma has become synonymous with that of the Absolute and Almighty. Kabīr and Nānak do not accept Rāma as an avatāra, Tulasīdāsa does; there are many other differences among these bhaktas and the movements they started. Islam has had some influence upon many North-Indian bhaktas, their *bhakti* recoils from image-worship and any monistic pantheism. Others, more numerous, following the theology of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Ādhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa,* profess a metaphysical non-dualism similar to that of Śaṅkara together with a deeply personalistic devotion.

F. Kṛṣṇa-Bhakti after the Bhāgavata

Many books would be required to describe the rich history of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti during the centuries that followed the Bhāgavata.

Nimbārka (12th cent) and *Madhva* (13th cent), like Rāmānuja, established religious orders for the propagation of their bhakti doctrines; these orders are still numerous and influential nowadays. In fact, *bhakti* spread all over India thanks to wandering saṅnyāsins who belonged to these and other religious orders; not books, but devotional songs and the recitation of the great bhakti texts have kept alive the ideals of loving surrender and trust in Bhagavān's grace.

Mahārāṣṭra and Bengal have been great fountain-heads of this bhakti stream. *Jñāneśvara, Nāmadeva, Ekanātha* and, above all, *Tukārāma* were great bhaktas whose *abhangs* (psalms) express a very pure and devout piety: these Mahratta saints avoided the excessive emotionalism of other bhaktas. In Bengal, *Caitanya*, the Navadvīpa preacher whom his disciples have exalted to the position of avatāra, propagated a very ardent type of devotion, extremely emotive; this *prema-bhakti* has been the theme of a very rich and vast devotional literature, still very popular in Bengal. *Vallabha,* Caitanya's Telugu contemporary, a passionate devotee of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, has had an immense influence in Gujarat, Rajputana and around Mathura. *Sūradāsa* and *Mīrābai* have composed songs on the Kṛṣṇa theme which are still sung everywhere in North-India.

In the next chapter, the doctrine of the great bhaktas is to be examined and briefly discussed from a Christian viewpoint. Suffice it to say here that much is deeply devotional and profoundly religious in this search of the Hindu bhaktas. At times, too much emotionalism and human elements of a less spiritual nature have somewhat corrupted their devotion; anthropomorphism has its dangers, and monistic philosophies sometimes tend to lead mysticism into sexual aberrations. Yet, Hindu bhaktas have called for God the Merciful with moving sincerity, and we may believe that His grace has been at work in the hearts and lives of many of those men and women whom we have not hesitated to call 'Hindu saints'.

Chapter 23

Doctrinal Background of the Bhakti Spirituality

(P. Fallon)

> *Sā tv-asmin parama-prema-rūpā.*
> The nature of bhakti is absolute love for Him.
> *(Nārada Bhakti Sūtra,* 2)
>
> *Sā parā anuraktir Īśvare.*
> Bhakti is supreme attachment to the Lord.
> (*Śāṇḍilya Sūtra,* 1, 1, 2)

The term *Bhakti-mārga* (Path of Devotion) or *Bhakti-yoga* (Devotional Discipline) refers to an extremely complex and manifold phenomenon. Throughout the centuries, bhakti has assumed so many forms and its theory has been elaborated by theologians and spiritual teachers of such diverse allegiances, that it is well-nigh impossible, in a book of this sort, to give a sufficient description of it.

Mahāyāna Buddhism produced a rich bhakti spirituality; the Śaiva bhakti, especially in South India, expressed itself in beautiful hymns and prayers, and its theological doctrine of grace was taught by great and saintly gurus; the Vaiṣṇava form of bhakti, according to the particular aspect or avatāra of the Deity upon which it was centred as also according to the various *sampradāyas* (schools) in which it was practised, has itself varied greatly; even Śāktas and Tantrikas, in Bengal especially, have worshipped the 'Mother' with a deeply emotional bhakti; in modern times, the Brahmos have prayed and sung their devotion in a manner much closer to our own Christian spirit, and the bhakti of Tagore's *Gītānjali,* though in direct continuity with the Vaiṣṇava prema-bhakti, strikes new accents and expresses a new ideal of devotion.

If we agree to start the history of bhakti with the *Bhagavadgītā* about the 4th or 3rd century B.C. (though there are unmistakable signs that the bhakti attitude was not uncommon even in earlier times) and follow its development through the Paurāṇic period to the days of the *Bhāgavata* (9th or 10th century A.D.), and, later, to the *Sūtra* period (the *Nārada* and the *Śāṇḍilya Sūtras* are basic texts, commented and interpreted many times by later bhakti gurus), finally to reach the rich efflorescence of bhakti literature and the many great bhakti movements of the 15th and 16th centuries, we shall find together with the richest variety, some common traits, some dominant ideas, a sameness of spiritual attitude: these only will be described here, more detailed study being left to those interested in any one particular bhakti school or movement.

A. The Nature of Bhakti

The word *bhakti*, generally translated as 'devotion', is rich with meaning: faith, love, loving surrender, devotional attachment, piety. It is closely associated with the word *pūjā*, which means adoration, reverence, worship; there is implied in these two words a very personal relation, a concrete and 'existential' attitude of reverential dependence and piety. The most normal gesture people make to express this feeling is the *praṇāma*. God is, of course, the supreme object of bhakti and pūjā, but the motherland, parents and elders, spiritual teachers and holy men are *pūjanīya* and, in various degrees, objects of bhakti; the 'praṇāma' made to them does convey this sense of deep reverence and worshipful devotion.

Leaving aside the secondary manifestations of bhakti, let us define bhakti according to the Sūtrakārās Nārada and Śāṇḍilya. The former has left 84, the latter 100 aphorisms or *sūtras*; an important commentary by Svapneśvara further develops and explains the doctrine of Śāṇḍilya. These three texts constitute most important sources. The following definitions and description are borrowed from them.

Bhakti is 'absolute love for Him'; it is 'supreme attachment to the Lord'. It is 'ambrosia', that divine drink or nectar which confers immortality. He who has obtained true bhakti is *siddha* (perfect), *amṛta* (immortal), *tṛpta* (satisfied, blessed); he desires nothing else; there is in him no sorrow, hatred, or passion. He is at peace, intoxicated with love, yet quiet, his mind centred on the Lord. All other affections are suppressed, selfishness is transcended, all forms of activity, sacred or profane, being dedicated to Him. Singleheartedness *(ananyatā ekāntabhāva)*, indifference *(udāsīnatā)* to all that is an obstacle to devotion, renunciation of all other props and supports, practice of those observances and duties only that are in accord with this entire dedication *(nivedita-ātma-loka-vedatva)*, intense attachment to pūjā and other religious acts of worship, pleasure taken in listening to discourses about the glory and greatness of the Lord, extreme desolation whenever the mind turns away from Him, bhakti is said to be higher than either *karma-yoga* (the path of observances and external activity) or *jñāna-yoga* (dry knowledge, philosophical meditation). Bhakti brings its own reward, it is not a means through which some ulterior aim is intended; it is disinterested, aiming at God alone *(ahaitukī)* and relying purely on His grace and love *(tat-kṛpa)*; it is more pleasing to God than any other path because he dislikes the proud *(abhimāni-dveṣī)* and loves the meek and humble *(dainyapriya)*. The two words which express best the attitude of the true bhakta are *nivedita*, (dedicated, consecrated, an oblate) and *arpita* (offered unto, surrendered to, given); two other words describe the intimate union between the devotee and his Lord: *tadīya* (belonging to Him, His) and *tanmaya* (full of Him).

Bhakti, i.e., loving devotion, gives the bhakta a much greater and more valuable knowledge of the Lord than any intellectual process of meditation or reflection. The relation between bhakti and jñāna has been variously explained in different schools. Faith *(śraddhā)* is of course always required as a precondition of genuine devotion; the worst vices are *kauṭilya* (crookedness or insincerity) and *aśraddha* (irreligiousness or unbelief); the study of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other Scriptures is everywhere considered as one of the first and necessary steps leading up to bhakti. The Gītā and even the *Bhāgavata* teach the complementariness of the various 'margas' and, though affirming the supremacy of bhakti, do not belittle the importance of discerning knowledge; gradually, however, the greatness of devotion came to be emphasised in such a manner as to diminish and nearly to suppress the role of knowledge; in some bhakti schools, devotion tends to become over-emotional, an altogether subjective and sentimental 'enthusiasm'.

Classes and Degrees: Nearly all authors agree on a twofold division of bhakti: the pure devotion of a Prahlāda, the young prince so enamoured of the beauty of the Lord that he would day and night, out of sheer joy and love, call or sing the name of Kṛṣṇa without asking for any favour, and the still imperfect bhakti of a Dhruva, the devotee who had placed his entire confidence in the power of the Lord and called upon Him in order to obtain from His grace a rich favour (the story goes on to say that, when Kṛṣṇa, pleased by this constancy in prayer, appeared and wished to give Dhruva his reward, the devotee, whose devotion had been purified and elevated through unfailing attention to the Lord, refused the formerly coveted favour, resting now in the pure joy of contemplating his Bhagavān). The superior and purer type of devotion is diversely described as *mukhyā* (primary), *ahaitukī* (motiveless, pure), *nirguṇa* (absolute), *rāgātmikā* (consisting of pure affection), *parā, paramā, siddhā* (transcendent, perfect). The other type of devotion, a lower, mixed, qualified or preparatory devotion, is rather a gradual ascent toward devotion than devotion itself in its truest form; it is called *gauṇi* (secondary), *haitukī* (interested, motivated), *saguṇā* (relative, worldly), *vaidhī* (law-abiding, formalistic), *aparā* (imperfect).

A—The imperfect devotion is further divided into three categories, either according to the relative prevalence of one of the 3 guṇas (*sattva, rajas* or *tamas*) or according to the type of motive which animates the devotee (*ārti:* danger, sickness, trouble, from which one begs to be freed; *jijñāsa:* intellectual curiosity, desire to know about God; *arthitva:* desire to obtain some boon or favour). There is a continuous progress from one type of bhakti to another, the very fact that the heart is turned toward the Lord gradually bringing about a purification of the devotee's mind. Some dishonest people invoke God to succeed in their sinful undertakings: this is *tāmasika* devotion; some selfish people only pray when they find themselves in trouble *(ārta)*. A less imperfect devotion is that of the bhaktas who pray for what is naturally desirable: children, fortune, reputation, power, etc.; this, though not sinful, is *rājasika* devotion only; it can be placed on the same level with the devotion of those who pray for knowledge out of mere intellectual curiosity (*jijñāsa*). The *sāttvika* devotion is that which makes one pray, unselfishly, for the welfare of others or for the obtention of spiritual perfection; the *arthārthī* bhakta is also one whose prayer is motivated by some desire, however praiseworthy the latter may be. In as much as it leads up to higher forms of devotion, every category of bhakti is valuable; Śāṇḍilya (2, 2, 4) explicitly states that all these secondary forms of devotion are conducive to purity *(pāvitrya)* and should be made use of according to time and need *(yathā-kāla-sambhava).* The *ārta* devotee, in his affliction, remembers the Lord; in his sinfulness, he implores His mercy; this humble and 'needy' prayer is more precious than any *prayaścitta* (expiatory rite); his devotion is still cloudy and overcast with selfish preoccupations (*tamas*) but it brings him nearer to God. The *jijñāsa* devotee, in his thirst for knowledge, studies the Scriptures, turns his attention to God. The *arthārthī,* whose devotion is mainly concerned with prayerful entreaty, comes gradually to ask but for one thing: the Lord's grace.

The first steps in the path of bhakti are often described according to a ninefold division: 1) *Śravaṇa* (listening to the praise of the Lord); 2) *kīrtana* (singing His praise); 3) *smaraṇa* (pious remembrance of the Lord); 4) *pāda-sevana* (serving His feet); 5) *arcanā* (adoration); 6) *vandanā* (salutation, praise); 7) dāsya (worship of the Lord as one's master and lord); 8) *sakhya* (worship of the Lord as a friend and companion); 9) *ātmanivedana* (self-dedication).

Later commentators and spiritual authors further divide the lower bhakti into 81 degrees.

B—The higher bhakti is pure and completely selfless love *(prema)* which makes the devotee adhere to *(āsakti)* the Lord with single-hearted *(ekānta)* attachment, destroying all other affections (*rāga-vināśa*), establishing the devotee in perfect peace and spiritual joy (*ānanda, ātmarati*). Nārada (*Sūtra* 82) describes 11 forms which this bhakti can take, the bhakta reaching the perfection of devotion in any one type of bhakti according to his particular vocation. Grace plays here the predominant role, this bhakti is pure grace, not the result of man's striving or systematic pursuit. This higher bhakti, though essentially one, can be: 1) attachment to the contemplation of God's attributes and greatness *(guṇā-māhātmya-āsakti)* in His outward manifestations; 2) contemplation of His beauty (*rūpa-āsakti*) as He is in Himself; 3) love of adoration (*pūjā-āsakti*), the quiet fixation of the mind on God; 4) love of contemplation *(smaraṇaāsakti)*, the loving remembrance of God; 5) love of the servant for his Lord *(dāsya)*, a more personal relation being now established between the bhakta and Bhagavān; 6) friendship (*sakhya*), some element of 'mutuality' making this bhakti more intimate; 7) parental affection *(vātsalya)*, a more familiar relation, similar to that loving relation which existed between Kṛṣṇa's foster-parents and the young Gopāla; 8) spiritual espousals *(kāntā-āsakti)*, God being considered as the divine spouse, the devotee assuming the attitude of a loving wife; 9) self-consecration *(ātma-nivedana)*, the entire surrender of self to the Beloved; 10) love of absorption (*tanmaya-āsakti*), the devotee having completely passed into the object of his contemplation, the whole world being filled with Him Whom he loves; 11) love in separation *(parama-viraha-āsakti)*, in which the devotee, for whom nothing exists any longer but the Lord with Whom he is intimately united, yet feels the excruciating pains of separation from Him. This pure and sublime bhakti is not only a means to obtain mukti (salvation), it *is* mukti; the heart of the perfect bhakta is free from all bonds, pure of all sins, the abode of God, permanently established (*saṃsthita*) in the Lord. The *virāha* (pangs of separation) is itself the highest form of union possible for the bhakta who, as *jīvanmukta* (liberated but still alive), is still tied to a material body, still deprived of the final and blissful *videha-mukti* (heaven).

All these classifications may seem very 'scholastic' and abstract. In fact, every single *bhāva* (sentiment, attitude of the mind) is illustrated by concrete and personal examples from the life of Bhagavān and His bhaktas. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in particular is an inexhaustible source of such illustrations; the devotee, being familiar with the story of Kṛṣṇa, will contemplate the Lord's *līlā* with the eyes of those who fondled him as a little child, of the cowherds who shared His boyish games and pranks, of the gopīs who were enamoured of His beauty and tasted the sweetness of His love, etc. The last *bhāva*, which is called the *mahābhāva*, the attraction felt for the *mādhurya* (sweetness, charm) of the Lord, is valued highly by most bhaktas. In many bhakti schools this aspect of the bhakti devotion received a dangerously exaggerated and unhealthy treatment, eroticism at times compromising the soundness and spiritual character of the bhakta's devotion.

B. Bhakti and Divine Grace

In all bhakti treatises the greatest stress is laid on the importance of God's grace. The *Upaniṣads* already had taught that divine election alone qualifies a man for personal communion with the Supreme Spirit:

Na-ayam Ātm¯ pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena,
yam eṣa -Eṣa vṛṇute tena labhyas tasya-Eṣa Ātmā vivṛṇute tanūm svām.

(This Spirit is not to be obtained through study, intellectual acumen or much learning. That very one whom He chooses shall obtain Him, to that one only this Spirit reveals His own nature.) Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 2,23.

The *Gītā* assigns an altogether central place to grace, and so do all the great bhakti theologians; Rāmānuja, Madhva, Nimbārka, Caitanya and the Gosvāmīs, Vallabha, all have built theological systems in which grace receives a prominent place. This divine grace: *anugraha, prasāda, puṣṭi, kṛpā,* is *the* means which habilitates the bhakta to the obtainment and practice of true bhakti; it awakens devotion in the heart, it purifies the mind and frees the devotee from the bondage of sin, it brings about the gracious indwelling of the Lord in the heart of his servant, it leads him to the final and beatific communion with God in the eternal Vaikuṇṭa, the paradise of the bhaktas.

In the hymns and prayers sung and composed by the bhakta saints, dependence upon God's grace is everywhere emphasised.

This divine grace is often mediated through holy men and, in particular, the guru who, for the bhakta, holds the place of God himself. (This *guru-bhakti,* an important feature of Hindu bhakti spirituality, has often led to abuses and spiritual aberrations.) The company of holy men and true devotees, the *mahat-saṅga, sat-saṅga,* which is itself regarded as a divine favour, is another important channel of divine grace. Another quasi-sacramental means of obtaining grace is the pious invocation of God's Name *(nāma-japa)*; the 'Name' is all-powerful and even sinners who inadvertently pronounced the sacred name of God have been saved.

Most bhaktas insist that grace elevates and transforms the bhakta but not without some collaboration, preparation or response, on his part. Detachment and humility, avoidance of evil company, faithful and unselfish fulfilment of one's social and other duties, constancy in prayer, these and many other moral obligations rest upon the true bhakta. Bhakti is a gift of the Lord to His chosen ones, but these have to respond to the advances of His love. There have been famous controversies, in South-India especially, regarding this question of the mutual relation of grace and free-will; some stressed the doctrine of *prapatti* (reliance upon the Lord) so much that they advocated complete quietism and passive surrender; the majority, however, warn the devotees against presumption and passivity, they expect in fact great virtue from them.

What is the theological nature of this divine grace the bhaktas rely upon? Is there any close parallel with the Christian doctrine of grace? Most bhakti theologians adhere to some form of Advaita; not the pure Advaita of a *Śaṅkara* but a non-dualism more or less tainted with *pariṇāmā-vāda,* viz., a metaphysical theory which introduces change or evolution *within* the Supreme Reality. They safeguard a certain distinction between the *jīvātmā* (individual soul) and the *Paramātmā* (Supreme Spirit), the individual being naturally divine without being God Himself. This pantheistic trend of most bhakti theologies as also the extremely anthropomorphic conception of eternal life upheld by the bhaktas made it impossible for them to reach a clear idea of the perfect gratuity of God's grace and of the infinite and supernatural greatness of its elevating power. Grace is a help given to man to enable him to realise what he essentially is rather than a supernatural gift which divinises a mere creature. The indwelling of God in the soul and the Trinitarian Life we are called to share and contemplate in the Beatific Vision are but dimly and faultily adumbrated in the Hindu conceptions of bhakti and mukti. As the correct idea of creation is generally absent from Hindu thought, so also there is lacking the knowledge Christian Faith gives us of this 'new creation', this 'rebirth' in Christ, this supernatural destiny to which divine grace raises us.

C. The Object of Bhakti

Though bhakti, in its lower and secondary manifestations, can have for its object some minor deity, the higher bhakti is centred on the Lord alone. 'The Lord' *(Īśvara)* is God conceived as a 'personal', all-powerful, all-merciful Being, both transcendent and immanent; He is the 'Bhagavān', the Blissful One, Love and Beauty infinite. But Hindu metaphysicians have never been able to understand personality except in terms of non-absolute reality; this is why the *saguṇa* Brahman is said to be the object of the bhakta's devotion, not the *nirguṇa* (unrelated absolute) Brahman. Most bhakti theologians have tried to solve this antinomy between the claims of their devotion, which is meaningless without a personal god, and those of their metaphysics, which tends to deny absolute transcendence to a personal being; they have generally failed, at least on the theoretical plane. The object of the bhakta's devotion is therefore *not God* but *a god*, the highest god he can imagine or conceive, an individual being but endowed with all the attributes and qualities that belong to the Divine, a being therefore which is said to be the Supreme Person *(Puruṣottama)*, identified even with the supreme Brahman, yet conceived as related and internally subject to change. This god of the bhakta is not God Himself, and all bhakti remains somehow idolatrous.[1]

But the bhakta wants to worship and to love a god whom he can see and touch and serve, a god who is near to his devotee. This desire exists even in idolatry, but in bhakti it becomes a moving and pathetic yearning for the Incarnate, the God-Man. The Hindu belief in *avatāras* is an anticipation, a shadowy but deeply sincere prefiguration of the Christian Mystery.

The *avatāra* doctrine evolved considerably from the days of the *Gītā* to those of the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*; it became even further complicated in the medieval bhakti schools. A 'descent' *(avatāraṇa)* of the Lord who, through the power of His *māyā*, assumes a human or other visible form; a 'theophany' of the Lord displaying His beauty and divine charm to attract the bhakta's mind away from earthly things; an appearance, partial and temporary, of the supreme deity with the object of performing some action necessary for the protection and 'salvation' of creation: the *avatāraṇa* is never Incarnation in the Christian sense. The 'body' or human shape assumed is not a real human nature, passible and earthly; it is made of *viṣuddha sattva* (heavenly matter), it is a passing manifestation only. The *avatāra* is not a 'new Adam' belonging to our race, 'one of us'; the *avatāra* is not *the Word made flesh*.

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[1] Father Dandoy once compared the bhakta's devotional attitude to that of Mary Magadalene weeping and waiting before the empty tomb on Easter Morn; the devotion is sincere, the love profound and the Lord will hear her cry but come to her from a direction she did not expect. Kierkegaard wrote: "One's prayer can be untrue though addressed to the true God, one can pray 'in truth' while worshipping an idol." Much bhakti is addressed to a god wrongly conceived, a related and non-absolute being: but the humble and loving prayer of the bhakta does, in many cases, I believe, reach, beyond images and concepts, the true God.

Though there were many 'descents' of the Lord, two *avatāras:* Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, have been the main objects of the bhaktas' devotion. The 'Rāma-bhakti,' at its best and purest with Tulasīdāsa, is generally more sober, ethical, sound and wholesome. But it is the 'Kṛṣṇa-bhakti' that has been most popular in India. Together with dangerous aberrations due to extreme emotionalism and an erotic context of symbolism and myths responsible for many misunderstandings, it has produced the most moving expressions of Indian bhakti.

According to many bhaktas, Kṛṣṇa is more than an avatāra. It is not enough to affirm that Kṛṣṇa is God, one must believe that God is Kṛṣṇa. Eternally, in the heavenly Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa plays with Rādhā his divine *Līlā;* at times, on the stage of this world, he comes to display his divine charm and enacts this *Līlā* the contemplation of which enraptures the bhakta's heart.

The concept of avatāra is infinitely varied. While ancient traditions spoke of ten avatāras of Viṣṇu (Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsiṃha, *Vāmana,* Parasurāma, Rāmacandra, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha and Kalkī), later scriptures list up as many as 24 avatāras (the *Bhāgavata* calls them *Līlā avatāras*). Any saint or spiritual teacher may be considered an avatāra in some degree. For many Hindus, the concept of avatāra is practically identical with that of eminent holiness, and this explains why, even in modern times, saintly men like Rāmakrishna have been raised to the rank of avatāra. Hindu idolatry is intimately connected with this avatāra doctrine: every consecrated image being an *arcāavatāra* and every holy man a particular embodiment of the Divine.

There is much that is wonderfully true, good and beautiful in Bhakti. Divine Providence has been at work here. There are, alas, serious shortcomings; the metaphysical doctrine of most bhaktas is not free from pantheistic monism; the idea of sin and of the need for redemption is at times obscure; anthropomorphism has lowered the gods of the devout bhaktas to the rank of exalted human beings; their bhakti is often too emotional and subjective. Yet Hindu bhakti must have led many souls to God because of the humble and loving surrender, the deep yearning and prayer, the confident reliance upon God's grace, of the true bhaktas. The words of Claudel in *The Satin Slipper* may again be recalled:

> A—It was good that you taught him longing.
> P— Longing for an illusion? For a shadow that evermore escapes him?
> A—Desire is for what is, illusion is what is not. Desire through and by illusion is of what is, by and through what is not.

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Chapter 24

Śaivism

(R. De Smet)

Hinduism presents itself as a group of various religious sects such as Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, Saktism and all their ramifications, which accepts the authority of the Śaivāgamās, Pāñcarātra Samhitās and Tantras respectively besides that of the Vedas. Śaivism, which has contributed much to the Hindu religious evolution since its revival in the seventh century A.D., consists in the exaltation of Śiva, whether as one person or as associated with a consort, to the position of a Supreme Being, exempt from subjection to the law of ultimate absorption into the universal spirit. Śaivism means exclusive devotion to a personal god, Śiva, who unlike the absolute Brahman possesses a body through which he thinks, feels and acts. The Śaivas are generally distinguished by a horizontal *tilaka* mark on the forehead, and rosaries of Rudrākṣa berries.

The steady rise of Śaivism to supremacy and the corresponding decline of Buddhism and Jainism were the most prominent features of the religious history of the period beginning from the sixth century A.D. In fact, it is at this period that the intolerant Śaśānka burnt and destroyed the Bodhi-tree at Gaya, as Hiuan-Tsang the Buddhist pilgrim from China narrates with horror.

A. The Origin and Development of Śaivism

The origins of Śaivism are obscure. Was it pre-Aryan and hence, probably Dravidian, or simply Aryan? The excavations at Mohenjo-Daro have provided some polished phallic stones and evidence of a cult of a Mother goddess, two elements which will find place in historical Śaivism. The excavators have also unearthed a single "roughly carved seal" representing a two-horned and three-faced male figure squatting amidst six animals. Sir J. Marshall saw in it a prototype of Śiva. Not all scholars have accepted this opinion which has been carefully criticized, e.g., by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, IV, 65-67.

The Aryan element of Śaivism can be traced as follows: Śiva as a proper name never occurs in the Ṛg-Veda; the adjective *śiva* (kind, benign, auspicious) is applied to various deities and once to Rudra who is then a minor but sharply characterized deity. The name Rudra means "the red one" or more likely "the howler". He is associated with the howling storms and the dangerous mountains and forests. He is the partner of **Agni** or even identified with the dreadful form of fire. He is the father of the **Maruts** (Pounders), a group of violent winds. A malevolent slayer of men, he is to be appeased (by a ritual full of prohibitions) and entreated to spare the worshipper from lightning, storm, fever and poison. If he does that, he is said to present his kindly (śiva) face. Thus he is and will remain an ambivalent deity, a destroyer-benefactor, a god of death and life.

By the time of the *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (around 300 B.C.) Rudra has become identified with the absolute monotheistic God and worshipped with *bhakti* at least by the "white mule" sect of ascetics:

> "Unique is Rudra, without a second;
> Over all the worlds he rules by his sovereign powers;
> Facing his creatures he stands, he, the Protector.
> All worlds he evolves and reabsorbs at the end of time."
> (Sv.iii,2)
>
> "Ah, to the God who illumines the intellect of the self,
> do I, eager for liberation, resort for refuge,...
> To him who is the highest bridge to immortality...
> By the power of austerity and by the grace of God
> Did the wise Svetāśvatara make Brahman rightly known
> To those who had gone furthest on the ascetic path
> Brahman supreme, holy, pleasing to the order of seers.
> This [is] the highest mystery of the Veda's end...
> To the great-souled *(mahātman)* man
> Whose highest-devotion is for God
> And for his guru even as to God
> The matter of this discourse shines forth with greatest
> clarity." (vi,18-23).

These final lines reveal the means of liberation we find in every later form of Śaivism: Under the illumination of the intellect *(buddhi)* by

God, as self *(ātman)* becomes eager for liberation *(mumukṣu)* and seeks refuge *(śaraṇa)* in him. His austerity *(tapas)* which detaches him from worldly desires is met by divine grace *(prasād)* which turns it into the highest devotion *(bhakti)*. He is now a self fixed on the Great *(mahātman)*.

The six chapters of this Upaniṣad may have been distinct compositions finally put together by a wise compiler. Ch. iii is a poetic sketch of primitive Vedic Śaivism (citing solar hymns from Ṛgveda and monotheistic hymns 7 and 8 from Atharvaveda X). Ch. iv and v expound the essence of Śaivism and Sāṅkhya whereas ch ii sketches out early Yoga. Ch. i and vi together with v constitute a unitary treatise in which the competing philosophies of that time are summed up and rejected in favour of the monotheistic conceptions of Śaivism.

Why is this Upaniṣad centred on Rudra? Probably because his ambivalence helped to solve the basic problem of monotheism which is the problem of evil: the evils which befall creatures are brought back somehow to the causality of the Creator himself because he is Rudra but are also healed by him because he is Śiva. Another difficulty of monotheism is also obviated, that of reconciling our inescapable conception of God as the perfect, hence, non-dynamic Absolute or Brahman, and our imagination that creating involves God in dynamism and change: Svetāśvatara conceives the divine energy *(śakti)* as neither identical with nor simply different from Śiva and being a sort of bridge between him and the creatures. Thus the Śaivism of this Upaniṣad is laid as the founding charter of all later Śaiva systems.

When statues of deities begin to be carved from about 100 A.D., figurations of Śiva make their appearance. His character is often typified by the reproductive *liṅga* rather than by any symbol of destruction. His representation as *Ardhanārī* (half male and half female) symbolizes the unity of the generative principle.

With regard to his corporeal appearance, Śiva has sometimes five faces, sometimes one face with three eyes to denote his insight into past, present and future time. A moon's crescent on the head (hence the name Candra-śekhara) marks the measuring of time by months while a serpent round his neck denotes the endless cycle of recurring years. A necklace of skulls *(kapālin)* with numerous serpents about his person symbolises the eternal revolution of ages and the successive dissolution and regeneration of mankind. He bears the Ganges (hence the name Gaṅgādhara) above his forehead because he intercepted its rush in its descent from Viṣṇu's foot, that the earth might not be crushed by the weight of the falling stream. His throat is blue (hence the name Nīlakantha) from the stain of the deadly poison Halāhala which would have destroyed the world, had not Śiva out of pity for mankind drunk it up, on its production at the churning of the ocean. He rides a white bull, called Nandi, which probably typifies generative energy. As Śiva is constantly engaged in battle with mighty demons such as Pura, Tripura, Andhaka, all of whom he fought and slew, he is armed with special weapons, namely, a trident *(triśūla)*, a bow *(ajagara)*, a thunderbolt *(vajra)* and an axe. He also holds in his hand a noose *(pāṣa)* to bind his enemies and a kind of rattle *(damaru)* to keep time while dancing.

In himself Śiva possesses a double nature, quiescent and active. The active is called his Śakti and is personified as his wife or the female half of his essence. In every one of his characters the consort of Śiva is not only his counterpart, but generally represents an intensification of his attributes. As destructress she is Kālī, as reproducer she is symbolised by the Yoni; or she is the type of beauty in Umā, and the mother of the universe as Jaganmātri. She has also the forms of a female ascetic (Yoginī), of a malignant being delighting in blood (Bhairavī, Durgā) and of a mountaineer (Pārvati).

Śiva's main activities can be summed up as follows. First, he is conceived as a fierce universal destroyer who annihilates at the end of every age *(kalpa)* not only men and other created things but good and evil demons and even Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and all the inferior gods (whence his names, Rudra, Mahākāla, Hara, etc.).

Secondly, he is the impersonation of the eternal reproductive power of Nature perpetually reintegrating after disintegration. He is eternally the blessed one or bestower of blessings, (whence his names Pitṛ, Matṛ, Sadāśiva, Śaṅkara and Śambhū).

Thirdly, he is the ideal ascetic who has attained the highest perfection in abstract meditation and austerity (whence his names Mahāt́apāḥ, Mahāýogī). In this character he appears half-naked (Digambara), with only one face, an ash-besmeared body and matted hair, and sitting in profound meditation under a Banyan tree.

Fourthly, Śiva is a contemplative philosopher and learned sage, the revealer of grammar to Paṇini, the greatest of the Indian grammarians. In this character he is represented as a Brāhman, wearing the Brāhmanic thread and well-versed in the Vedas.

Fifthly, he is a wild and jovial mountaineer (Kirāta), addicted to hunting and wine-drinking, often dancing with his wife the Tāṇḍava dance, surrounded by buffoon-like troops. The idea of Śiva as engaged in sport quite permeates the Śaiva system and is often explained by reference to his omnipotence. All his operations are easy to him, involving no effort, so that he is said to "act without acting" and thus everything he does is sheer sport; the whole universe is bright with his smile and alive with his joyous movements. The dancing of Śiva, especially in the Golden Hall at Chidambaram, is symbolical of his perpetual and gracious action throughout the universe and in loving hearts. This dance is interpreted differently as the symbol of the destruction of the world or of the liberation of souls or more universally as the source of all movements, the origin of the five cosmic acts *(pañcakṛtya)*: production, preservation, destruction, embodying and liberation.

Thus both the Vedic literature concerning Rudra, Agni and Indra and the aboriginal cults of the gods of procreation, mountain spirits, demons and spirits of the dead supply certain data from which we can frame some idea of the complex character of Śiva. Śiva is probably a figure of Dravidian origin, assimilating the old Dravidian deity Seyyan, the "red" god of war, the son of the "victorious" goddess Koṛavai. Perhaps his cult originated in the mountains of the North-West but it spread quickly to the South and to the rest of India by the time of the Christian era. As Śiva rose to eminence as the supreme God, he became the object of speculation and meditation, and this led to the formation of various sects within Śaivism itself.

B. The Śaiva Sects

Liṅgāyats belonging to the Vīra Śaiva sect which is prevalent in Karṇāṭaka and Mahārāṣṭra, wear the Liṅga on their persons. They were founded by a leader named Vṛṣabha who taught the suppression of all caste distinctions and the uselessness of all Brahmanical rites. They bury instead of burning their dead and are strict vegetarians.

The Kāpālikas (skull-bearers) and Kālāmukhas (black-faces) form a group of worshippers of Śiva whose tenets and practices are gruesome and repulsive; they are called Mahāvratins (observers of the great vow) and the greatness of their vow consists in its extraordinary nature such as eating food placed in a human skull and besmearing their body with the ashes of human corpses. They were addicted to the worship of the female principle, which at times tended to degenerate into licentious orgies. More recent are the Gorakhnāthīs or Kaṇphaṭayogins, the Yogins with split ears, who form a school of Yoga (Haṭha Yoga) and are found chiefly in Northern India.

The Pāśupatas (adorers of Paśupati or Rudra-Śiva), whose founder was Lakulin (club-carrier), a yogin who passed for an avatāra of Śiva in the region of Baroda, are yogins who attain ecstasy by means of violent practices. According to *Sarvadarśanasaṁgraha* (14c.) the Pāśupata system exposes the five categories, the knowledge of which is needed for man to attain his last end. They are (a) *Kārya*, the effect, i.e., the dependent composite of knowledge *(vidyā)*, organs of knowledge *(kalā)* and individual soul *(paśu)*—the individual souls are called *paśu* (cattle) because they are fettered by the shackle *(pāśa)* of matter from which they can be delivered; (b) *Kāraṇa*, the cause, identified with *pati* (the Lord), i.e., Śiva whose body is "made of energy" and who creates and destroys the world; (c) *Yoga*, the union of *paśu* and *pati*, obtainable either through ritual actions, meditations, etc. or through pure abstract consciousness (*saṃvid*); (d) *Vidhi*, the injunction, which consists in "vows" *(vrata)* and "doors" *(dvāra)*; the vows are the following: to besmear one's body with ashes, to sleep on a bed of ashes, to worship Śiva by means of laughter, song, dance, the *huḍuk* onomatopoeia, prostration and prayer; the doors or means consist in snoring, trembling, limping, mimicking a lover, acting and talking incoherently; (e) *Duḥkhānta* (the end of misery) is of two kinds: the acquisition of superhuman powers, and the total destruction of misery. The Pāśupata scheme is a method of intense asceticism in which Grace has no place.

C. The Śaivism of the Āgamas

Among the more benign and sober developments within the fold of Śaivism is the Śaivism of the *Āgamas* (Tradition), which dates from the seventh century A.D. or even earlier and designates a sort of canon of twenty-eight texts, ten of which are "good" *(sat)* and called *Śaiva* while the other eighteen are "bad" *(asat)* and called

Raudra. The number of their auxiliary treatises *(upāgamas)* adds up to 198. It is not certain whether this literature originated in North or South India.

According to the *Āgamas*, Śiva is *Pati* (the Lord), the beginningless and omniscient Being. His body is the pure energy *(Śakti)* by which he can act upon unconscious matter. It is the cause both of the shackle *(pāśa)* which fetters souls and of their liberation. Souls are eternal and possess the spiritual energy *(citśakti)* which makes them capable of action and knowledge. They are actually hampered by a threefold impurity *(mala)*; namely, *āṇava* (ignorance — the term comes from *aṇu* (atom) and is used here probably because ignorance reduces the powers of the soul to atomic size), *karma* (actions and their effects) and *māyā* (the cosmic illusion which is the material cause of the world). The grace *(anugraha)* of the Lord alone can deliver the souls from these fetters and enable them to attain liberation which consists in their identification with Śiva and the realisation of their true nature.

D. The Śaivism of the Tamil "Saints"

The most remarkable product of Śaivism presents itself in the devotional hymns of the sixty-three Nāyanārs, the Śaivite "saints" of Tamil Nad, from the seventh century onwards. The Tamil hymns of the three greatest of them, Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar, form the *Tevāram*, the first of the twelve canonical books called *Tirumuṛai* of Dravida Śruti. The eighth Tirumuṛai is the incomparable *Tiruvācakam* of Māṇikkavācakar. In all these hymns there is no systematic theology of Śaivism but a record of vivid personal experience, the fundamental theme of which is expressed by Tirumular: "The ignorant say that Love and God are different; when they know that Love and God are the same, they rest in God's Love" — "They have no love for God who have no love for all mankind."

Śaivism for Appar is an optimistic religion, for it teaches and preaches man's firm belief in God's mercy and love. Śiva exists everywhere in a subtle form and will appear to man if he is a true Bhakta: "As fire in wood, as ghee in milk, the Luminous one lies hid within. First fix the churning stick of love, pass round the cord, intelligence, then twirl and God will bless thy sight." Appar considers Śaivism as a universal religion meant for everyone. Even an illiterate, provided his mind is attuned to and intent on Śiva's love and service, can obtain salvation. What is important in the Śaiva religion is the inward and spiritual worship: "Why bathe in Gaṅgā's stream or Kaveri?...Release is theirs, and theirs alone, who call in every place upon the Lord of all." "Why chant the Vedas, hear the śāstras' lore?...Release is theirs, and theirs alone, whose heart from thinking of its Lord shall never depart." Without bhakti śāstric knowledge is useless; asceticism and penance are of no value; the only thing needed is a true recognition of the Almighty as Śiva and Paśupati and an uninterrupted devotion to Him. Every man of true faith and devotion is master of his fate; fatalism is no creed of Appar. Sambandar in a beautiful hymn promises light, freedom from rebirth and bliss through loving devotion *(patti* for skt. *bhakti)* to Śiva at Ārūr (now Tiruvallūr in the Tanjore District): "The truth will arise in you: for the Father at Ārūr sprinkle ye the bloom of love; in your heart will dawn true light, every bondage will remove." The mystic formula of the five syllables, *Namaḥ Śivāya* (Adoration to Śiva), is a help to those votaries who cannot otherwise attain to the bliss of mystical quietude *(samādhi)*. "They who recite it with tears of love *(kādal)* receive life and guidance; it is the true essence of the four Vedas; it is the name of the Lord: Honour to Śiva."

Māṇikkavācakar in the ninth century wrote deeply religious hymns *(Tiruvācakam)* which depict the progress of a soul out of the bondage of ignorance and passion into the liberty of light and love. The poet's favourite theme is the wonder of divine grace shown forth in his own life and he tells without reserve the marvel of his first conversion, his joy and exaltation, his subsequent waywardness, his falls, his shame and his final recovery and triumph. With a tender familiarity with God he exclaims: "There was in thee desire for me, in me for thee." Few works in India's religious literature excel Tiruvācakam in wisdom and grace, lofty feeling and fervid piety, passionate longing for spiritual realisation and faith in divine grace.

Let us highlight some of the important themes of this great sage. In *Ko-thumbi* (Song of the Bee), he strongly rejects polytheism: "There is only one God and the other gods are sham." In *Sethilapatthu* (Decade of the Weariness of Life) he describes the infinity of bliss in Śiva and asserts that he knows no other than Śiva. *Tirupalli Eluchi* (Morning Hymn) with the refrain "From off thy couch in grace arise," expresses "the freedom of the uplifted soul". The image of God is laid upon a couch each evening and taken up or roused in the morning. *Arulpatthu* (Decade of Grace) has for its subject the purification of the soul from the great delusion. The sage looks upon life as a probation, a preparation for endless fellowship and communion with the Supreme through his grace. He emphasises the need for prayer and worship. *Kulaita-patthu* (Decade of the Bruised Heart) is a touching expression of absolute mystic self-renunciation. The sage prays for mercy and forgiveness of offences since prolonged useless suffering defers the hope he entertains of realising God, his only desire, and bruises his heart. *Uyurrunni-patthu* (Decade of Soul-Consumption) is a wonderful example of the enthusiastic bhakti which transcends every kind of religious observance, and is the dominant idea of the Śaiva system which receives in its fold men of all castes who love God with unspeakable fervour. *Punarchi-patthu* (Decade of Mystic Union) exhibits the nature of release as mystic union with Śiva.

The prominence given in these hymns to the operation of divine grace is remarkable. The remedy for *Irul* (āṇava, i.e., ignorance) is *Arul* (anugraha, i.e., grace). Divine and mystical Knowledge in the shape of grace is imparted to souls in order to dissipate the darkness of āṇava and to show the way to deliverance. The realisation of one's abjection makes the freely given grace of God seem all the more wonderful, for what has the wholly self-sufficient God to gain from association with one so foul? "Thou gav'st thyself, thou gainest me; which did the better bargain derive? Bliss found I in infinity; but what didst thou from me derive?"

E. The Śaiva Siddhānta

The Śaiva Siddhānta is the theology of that monotheistic religion which developed outside the Brāhmanic circles both in Tamil and Sanskrit. Of the fourteen texts which constitute the canon of Tamil Śaivism, the *Śiva-Jñāna-bodham* of Meykandar, written in the first half of the thirteenth century A.D., is the first attempt at a systematic statement of the tenets of Tamil Śaivism. It is a translation and commentary of twelve Sanskrit Sūtras of the Rauravāgama. Next comes the *Śiva-Jñānasittiyar* of Arulnandi, which is, in fact, the classic treatise on Tamil Śaivism. Then eight complementary works by Umāpati.

Like all philosophy of religion, the Śaiva Siddhānta seeks to determine the relation of God to souls and the world. Arulnandi argues against the advaitic solution that "if you say that all knowledge is illusion, what you call Brahman is Illusion; and if Brahman is Illusion, the assumption of intelligence falls to the ground." Again Siddhāntins argue against Sāṅkhya that God is not just a co-ordinate reality together with souls and the world but the Lord of souls, the ground of their being, the goal of their prayer, and the owner of the world.

The epistemology of the Śaiva Siddhānta gives prime importance to *Śabda* (testimony), i.e., the tradition handed down by the Śaivite Gurus. Śiva is the greatest of the Gurus and his grace illumines the soul's intellect when the latter submits to the teaching of human gurus. The importance of *anumāna* (inference) is also recognised, and many rational arguments for the existence of the supreme cause of the world and of the spiritual souls are proposed by the Siddhāntins.

There are three eternal and real substances: Pati (*Irai* in Tamil), Paśu *(Uyir)* and Pāśa *(Kattu)*.

(a) *Pati* (the Lord) is Śiva, who is all, but all is not God. He is therefore all and not all *(Ellamāi allavumāi)*; He is immanent in everything and yet transcends everything. He is *Sat* (Existence), *Cit* (spirit) and *Ānanda* (Bliss). He is the efficient cause *(Nimitta Kāraṇa)* and his Sakti, composed of knowledge, action and desire, is the instrumental cause. *(Tuṇai Kāraṇa)* of the world and of souls. He stands in relation to the universe as the soul to the body. As eyes cannot see but for the light of the soul, the soul cannot know but for the light of God. God and the soul are not one in the sense that they cannot be disjoined; they exist and function together. Their unity, however, is not such as to deny their distinct existence. Advaita does not mean oneness but inseparability.

(b) *Pāśa* (the "shackle") — or *mala* (impurity) — stands for bonds of āṇava (ignorance), karma (effects of actions) and māyā (empirical reality). *Āṇava* is the principle of man's arrogance (denial of dependence on God) and ignorance (as to his true relation to God). *Karma* is the accumulation of the merits and demerits of the soul's actions, the result of which is bondage to the cycle of rebirth. *Māyā* does not mean illusion; the Tamil word māyā is a compound of *mai* (destruction) and *ayi* (evolution). It is the substratum from which the phenomenal world is evolved. The material world is for, ever undergoing a process of evolution, maintenance and dissolution. Its products are the evolutionary forces *(kala)*, the 36 material principles *(tattva)*, the 224 worlds, the 51 letters, etc. The material cause of the world is *śuddha māyā*, the primeval stuff whence the universe organised as clay is converted into shapely jars. Its efficient cause is the eternal and intelligent Śiva who operates through his Śakti as the potter uses his wheel and moulding-stick. The creation, preservation and destruction of the world take place in order to deliver the souls from the threefold bondage.

(c) *Paśu* (the soul) is endowed with knowledge, volition and action; it experiences itself as limited, finite and ignorant due to the three kinds of pāśa. Āṇava is the root evil which completely veils the soul's faculties of knowing, willing and desiring. The soul stands in a beginningless and involuntary association with āṇava which is postulated to explain the embodiment of the soul. The āṇava-fettered soul in its primeval state *(kevala)* is not only "an imperfect, sin-laden, devitalised weakling", but it does not know it is in such a state, since it is by itself helpless even to initiate the process of release, Śiva imparts to the soul *pāsajñāna* (knowledge that centres round the sensible world) by providing it with body, senses, world, and enjoyment, and thus the soul passes to the state of integration *(sakala)*. This knowledge leads to good and evil acts, the next result of which lands the soul in several rebirths. Strictly speaking karma and māyā are not evils; they are the agencies for good made use of by Śiva for the purification of the soul from āṇava. Thus in the course of its births, the soul realises the transitoriness of the worldly things and their inability to satisfy its aspirations. To such a soul the three paths of *caryā* (service), *kriyā* (worship) and *yoga* (meditation), which should be animated by *bhakti* or loving devotion to Śiva, are proposed. This disposes the soul to receive gratuitously from Śiva *patijñāna* (divine knowledge) which alone makes union with Śiva possible. Śiva imparts this divine knowledge by way of intuition to highly advanced souls and through a human guru to less advanced ones; hence the yearning of the bhaktas to meet the guru through whom Śiva may give divine knowledge. It is also said that the spiritual endeavour of souls already freed of one or two of their three bonds should develop by way of helping those still fully bound. If, unmindful of their own burden, they endeavour to lighten the burden of others, they get rid of their own in the process, "even as persons struggling against sleep when snow-bound save themselves incidentally by carrying those who have been overpowered by sleep."

The soul, freed from the threefold bond through Śiva's grace, "rises to live eternally in the conscious, full enjoyment of Śiva's presence". The emancipated soul in becoming *"Śivamaya"* does not become Śiva himself. Śiva is bliss itself whereas the soul can but enjoy that bliss. The liberation of the soul consists in an intimate association like that of fire and the ball of iron, or salt and water, but not in a complete cessation of separateness. However, since the delivered soul loses all activity which it might have apart from Śiva, it does not enjoy any personal bliss but shares passively the pure bliss of Śiva.

F. The Śaivism of Kashmir

The Śaiva religion and philosophy of Kashmir, which appear just before or in the early ninth century, rest upon three groups of documents: (a) the *Āgamaśāstras,* attributed to Vasugupta, containing the 77 Śivasūtras which teach the means of deliverance; their main commentators are Bhāskara and Kṣemarāja; (b) the *Spandaśāstra,* attributed to Kallata, forming a sort of commentary on the Śivasūtras; (c) the *Pratyabhijñāna Śāstra,* composed by Somānanda, containing the real philosophical basis of the system. In the native literature it is known as the "Triple Instruction" *(Trika Śāsana).*

Trika is a pure monistic philosophy. Śiva is the only reality and is pure Intelligence, infinite and transcendent; he is the underlying reality *(ātman)* of the universe which he emanates as his Śakti. He is also called *spanda,* i.e., the "vibration" which originally differentiates knowledge and objects of knowledge, the two factors of cosmic evolution. Indeed Śiva's consciousness is conceived on the pattern of human consciousness, that is to say, as a consciousness which differentiates itself by going outwards and reintegrates itself by returning inwards. The first is a process of self-denial and self-forgetting through which the world and all its particular and limited entities are emanated, while the second is a process of self-recognition through which the pure identity of Śiva is recovered and salvation obtained.

The emanation of the world is not merely a *vivarta* or illusory self-modification; it is also an *ābhāsa,* an "illumination," similar to that through which the light of a central fire radiates and lights up other fires while itself remaining unaffected and undivided. It is also said to be like the manifold reflection of one jar in a series of mirrors and like the creation of a multiplicity of dream forms during sleep, without any real changing of jar or dreamer. It is illusory insofar as Śiva is not at all transformed, yet it is quite real inasmuch as its products have all the reality which they appear to possess.

The effects that constitute the world are reduced to 36 *tattvas* or categories which fall under three main groups: *śuddha* (pure), *śuddhāśuddha* (pure-impure) and *aśuddha* (impure) tattvas. (a) The first group accounts for the first steps of the cosmic emanation: Paramaśiva who is pure luminosity *(prakāśa)* opposes himself to himself through the mirroring instrumentality of his *śakti,* which is the original principle of negation *(atiśunyātman)*; thus the universe in its basic form is expressed in the relation of opposition between the Śiva-subject and a Śiva-object. (b) The second group of tattvas comprises essentially the finite souls *(puruṣas)* and the various determinations which fetter them. Souls and their fetters are the result of the further differentiation of the fundamental form of Śiva-object. (c) Each one of the puruṣas acts upon, and reflects himself in, a material nature *(prakṛti)*. The third group of tattvas is formed of the 24 material categories, which Trika holds in common with Śaṅkhya.

Though the soul in its true nature is identified with Śiva himself, yet it is deprived of its absoluteness and involved in the bonds *(pāśa)* of the three defilements; therefore it considers itself as finite and imperfect. The only way of attaining perfect bliss is by means of a recognition *(pratyabhijñā)* of its true self; transcending the whole process of reflected consciousness *(ābhāsa)*, instantaneous intuition of pure consciousness *(bhairava* or *pratibhā)*, must flash like lightning, filling up the universe and burning all impurities. The awakened soul thus realises its true nature and becomes one with the Lord.

G. Vīraśaivism

(J. Gonsalves)

It is in Karṇāṭaka, where Śaivism was eagerly supported by the Kālamukha and Pāsupata schools, that Vīraśaivism blossomed in the 12th century under the impulse of Basavesvara, the minister of king Bijjala of Kalyāna. It arose as a remarkable socio-religious movement. Rallying devotees who took their refuge in Śiva *(Śiva-saraṇa)* and henceforth carried his emblem, their *iṣṭa-liṅga* on their body as his actual presence in them, it pitted them in protest against the brāhmanic oppression of the temple cult and a society stratified on the basis of caste and untouchability. Those devotees *(bhakta)* were called *vīras,* ardent heroes, and *liṅgāyats,* made great by wearing the liṅga as the goal of all their orientation.

Basava, a learned Brāhmin, traces his lineage not only to the 63 Tamil saints, the *Nāyanārs,* but even to humble artisan-devotees like the cobbler Cennaya, the tanner Kakkaya, etc. He adopts the 28 *Śivāgamas* as the source of his religion but he and his co-devotees express themselves in a unique literary genre in their vernacular Kannada, the *vacanas,* i.e., the spontaneous prose "utterances" arising from their spiritualized hearts. In the original "their word-magic and cadence lift them to the level of poetry" (Namdimath 1979). Here is one in translation:

> The rich will make temples for Śiva.
> What shall I, a poor man, do?
> My legs are the pillars, my body the shrine,
> My head a cupola of gold.
> Listen, O Deity of Kuḍala Saṅgam,
> Things standing shall fall
> But the moving shall ever stay.

"Kuḍala Saṅgam Deva" is the *aṅkita* (seal, signature) of Basava whose preferred invocation was to Śiva as venerated at the confluent *(kuḍala)* of the Kṛṣṇa and the Malaprabhā rivers. Every vacana dramatises a liṅgāyat theme (bhakti, social concern, etc.) through oppositions like standing/moving, making/being, rich/poor, temple/body, etc.

Doctrine: Not much different from the other forms of Śaivism, Vīraśaivism is monotheistic and merges some dualism with its non-dualism so that it is called *Dvaitādvaita.* The universe comes from Śiva through his creative energy or *Śakti.* Śiva as beyond attributes whether positive or negative is *śūnya* (empty) but as containing all beings inseparably from himself, he is their place or *sthala.* In himself, as the worshipped Śiva, he is the *liṅgasthala* with his *śakti* whereas the creaturely worshippers he originates are the *aṅgasthala* energized by the same śakti as *bhakti.*

Discipline: In spite of their fundamental oneness with Śiva, these worshipping souls *(jīva)* exist in bondage as infected by the three stains *(āṇava-māyā-kārmika)*. Freedom from these and realization of their oneness with Śiva is reached by a *bhakti* path. The jīva is initiated to it by a guru who, first, invests him with an *iṣṭa-liṅga,* then teaches him the eight aids of faith and the fivefold code of behaviour.

Aṣṭāvaraṇas are the 8 "coverings" that protect from the worldly onslaughts. They are: *guru* (obedience to the spiritual guide), liṅga (wearing of one's iṣṭa-liṅga), *jaṇgama* (veneration of the "moving" Śiva, i.e., the wandering ascetic), *pādodaka* (sipping the water made holy by washing the feet of guru or jaṅgama), *prasāda* (eating remainders of the food first offered to them or to the liṅga), *vibhūti* (smearing one's body with sacred ashes to signify domination of the senses), *rudrākṣi* (wearing a rosary of sacred beads), *mantra* (recitation of the praise **"Namāḥ Śivāyaḥ"**.

Pañcācāras are five moral obligations of social relevance. They are *liṅgācāra* (wearing the liṅga unpolluted and venerating it as Śiva), *Śivācāra* (acting according with one's faith and treating all devotees alike), *sadācāra* (leading a virtuous life in one's avocation, *kāyaka), bhṛtyācāra* (acting as the servant of others), *gaṇācāra* (sacrificing oneself in defence of the faith and the community of Śiva-śaraṇas. Through all these, one progresses towards the realization of one's oneness with Śiva *(liṅgāṅga sāmarasya)* through 6 steps:

Ṣaṭ-sthalas or the 6 steps are: *bhakta* (the initial focusing on Śiva as Creator with faith, virtuous conduct and offerings from one's income to liṅga, guru and jaṅgama), *maheśvara* (fully convinced faith, steadfast bhakti and overcoming of temptations by saying no to others' wealth, wife or god), *prasādi* (seeing the Lord's providence in all events and everyone engaged in divine work; hence, receiving all things as his gifts and thus practising *avadhāna bhakti), prāṇaliṅgi* (in which the wall of duality falls and, experiencing all that through an inner *anubhāva,* one is filled with compassion), *śaraṇa-sthala* (being pervaded by the joy of divine consciousness and seeing the Absolute as the all-indwelling Spirit), *aikya-sthala* (complete unitive consciousness). The highest form of this bhakti is reached by the *jaṅgama* who, embodying the spiritual force, energizes society with the vision of God.

Summing up, we may say with S.C. Nandimath: "Democratic in spirit, puritanical in fervour, with service for its watchword and the sat-sthalas for its signposts, Vīraśaivism firmly blends together man's spiritual and social lives and thus teaches all the art of right living."

Conclusion

As a system of religious thought, as an expression of faith and life in God, Śaivism is by far the best that India possesses; judged by its instrinsic merits Śaivism represents the high water mark of India's deeply religious intuition and life, for this religion favours a piety based on a conception of God and his relationship to the world, which stands nearer to Christianity than does any other system.

Śaivism establishes the existence of a unique personal God and conceives God as omniscient and omnipotent, the one Cause and the only Lord of the universe. Immanent in every creature and especially abiding in the heart of all intelligent souls, He directs all things to their end, illuminating souls through the grace of his inner teaching and conducting them through purification to the experience of his own bliss. His immanent presence in the universe through causality and providence does not exclude his perfect transcendence. The concept of God as love and of His action as springing from his loving care for his creatures is certainly admirable. Moreover, the spiritual souls are endowed with knowledge and love, and hence are capable of sharing in divine bliss. The doctrine of their utter dependence on God as the cattle *(paśu)* on their master and of their release through God's grace alone bespeaks deep religious insight.

So highly religious in its essence, Śaivism contains two elements which make it irremediably anthropomorphic: it attributes a body to Rudra-Śiva, and it retains the ambivalence of Rudra. Hence, especially when communicated to the undiscerning masses, with an abundance of legends which present Śiva as lascivious and cruel, his śakti as a female partner and his symbolic liṅgam as phallic (originally a pillar symbolizing the sacrificial flame, Agni, according to some), it would have coalesced later on with neolithic snake-cults and ancestors' cults.

The theologies of Śaivism soar very high towards pure monotheism. Śaiva Siddhānta is the least weighed down by anthropomorphism. But Trika imports into God man's mode of thought and develops on that base a refined system. Like similar Western systems (of Plotinus, Scotus Erigena and Hegel) it yet opens up unto monotheistic mysticism.

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Chapter 25

Sikhism

(L. Pereira)

Besides the Kabīr panthīs (cfr.ch.22 E) or "followers of Kabīr's way," Kabīr's reformation had several offshoots. The most important among them is Sikhism, founded by Guru Nānak (1469-1538), and developed under nine successors equally called *Guru* (spiritual master).

A. The Granth Sāhib and Sikh Religious Life

The name *Sikh* derives from the Sanskrit *śiṣyā* (disciple). A Sikh is a believer in the ten *Gurus* and the sacred *Granth Sāhib* (Noble Book). Compiled largely by the fifth Guru (Arjun), and given its final form by the tenth Guru (Govind Singh), the *Granth* is the pivot of a Sikh's religious life. It is also called the *Ādi Granth* (Initial Book) to distinguish it from the non-sacred *Daśam Granth* (Book of the Tenth Guru).

A Sikh's worship consists mainly in reciting or singing hymns from the Granth. Children are given names according to the first letter on the page appearing when the Granth is opened at random. When of age, the young Sikhs acquire full rights (to marry, to enter the holiest shrines, etc.) through a ceremony of "baptismal" initiation in which they are sprinkled with sugared water (called *amṛt* or ambrosia) while passages from the Granth are recited. In the marriage ceremony, an essential part of the rite is walking four times around the Granth, the bride behind the groom and holding the hem of his garment. At death, hymns from the Granth are chanted during the cremation of the corpse.

The Sikh temple is called a *gurudvāra* (Guru's gate). The chief *gurudvāras* are in the Punjab, where alone Sikhism has a real hold. A *gurudvāra* is characterised by its tall yellow flagpole flying a triangular yellow flag with the Sikh symbol, which consists of a quoit, a dagger, and two swords. The *gurudvāras* serve also as schools, meeting-places, and rest-houses for the traveller.

The most precious object in the *gurudvāra* is a copy of the Granth laid on a low cot and draped in costly cloths on which offerings of food and money are placed. Worshippers approach it with covered heads and bare feet, rubbing their foreheads on the ground in obeisance. This extraordinary worship of a book (far beyond all the veneration accorded to the Vedas, Quran, or Bible by their respective followers) is linked to a cardinal Sikh belief: the Granth does not merely enshrine sacred words; *it is the mystic personality of the Gurus.*

B. The Ten Gurus

(1) *Guru Nānak* (1469-1538). Many accounts of Nānak's life exist, but they mix legends with the few facts that are historically certain. He was born into a Kṣatriya family at Tolwandi near Lahore. His disposition seems to have been gentle and markedly religious with a dash of kindly humour. Although he did marry, he finally abandoned his family. Wandering as an ascetic for many years, he came under various Hindu and Muslim (especially Sūfi) influences.

Nānak borrowed freely from Sufism but was more deeply moulded by Kabīr's reformed brand of Hinduism. He rejected rituals, pilgrimages, fasts, and every outward observance that made for disunity and intolerance. His hymns, set to music in the vernacular of the time, caught the imagination of the Punjab peasantry and soon won for him a large following. And when he died, it is said that all desired to honour him, the Muslims wishing to bury his body and the Hindus to cremate it.

It is doubtful whether Guru Nānak aimed at establishing a new religion, or even a new religious community. However, some six months before his death, he took the momentous step of choosing a devoted disciple Lehna to be his successor (in preference to his own sons). This move ushered in the long line of Gurus, and from the start Sikhism broke with Hindu ascetic and celibate traditions, for Lehna was a married man. The Sikhs have ever since remained a body of householders without an official priesthood.

Nānak changed his successor's name to Aṅgad, meaning "part of his own self". Hence the Granth says, "Through him (Aṅgad), Nānak himself reigns as Guru." In fact all the succeeding gurus used to sign themselves Nānak. "As one lamp is lit from another" so was the one Guru considered present in successive bodily forms. In the words of an official Sikh formula: "All ten Gurus are revelations of one light and one form."

(2) *Guru Aṅgad* (1504-1552) compiled Nānak's compositions in a new script called *Gurumukhī* (from the Guru's mouth). He also developed centres for propagating Nānak's doctrine—a first step towards the *gurudvāra*.

(3) *Guru Amar Dās* (1479-1574), a disciple of Aṅgad, was chosen at the age of 73. He introduced the *laṅgar* (free common kitchen) to abolish caste distinctions, and fashioned Sikh versions of Hindu rites and festivals.

(4) *Guru Rām Dās* (1534-1581) was son-in-law of Amar Dās. Becoming Guru in 1574, he later entered into friendly relations with the Emperor Akbar. He also established the city of Ramdāspur (the present Amritsar) and there laid the foundations of what is today Sikhism's central shrine: the Golden Temple *(Harimandira or Darbār Sāhib).* With Arjun, the youngest son of Ram Dās, the Guruship became hereditary, following always the direct male line.

(5) *Guru Arjun* (1563-1606) did much for Sikh trade, power and political influence. He built large *gurudvāras* and founded a new town (Kartarpur). His organising activities drew the envy and fear of the Emperor Jahangir, who had the Guru tortured to death at Lahore in 1606. Arjun was the first of many Sikh martyrs. His other great title to fame is the compilation of the *Ādi Granth* which he completed in 1604. Arjun's collection brought together the compositions of Nānak and the succeeding Gurus (himself included), with additional hymns from Kabīr, Nāmdev, twelve other *bhagats*, and fifteen *bhāṭs* (professional panegyrists). The most celebrated of Arjun's own hymns is the *Sukhmaṇī* (hymn of peace).

(6) *Guru Har Govind* (1595-1645) assumed leadership at the age of eleven. A brave warrior, he reacted to his father's martyrdom by organising his followers into an army. The Guru now wore two swords to symbolise an authority that was at once spiritual *(faqīrī)* and secular *(amīrī).* The first clashes with Mogul troops occurred in Har Govind's time.

(7) *Guru Har Rai* (1630-1661) further developed the army.

(8) *Guru Har Kṛṣan* (1656-1664) became Guru at the age of five and died three years later.

(9) *Guru Teg Bahādur* (1621-1675) was publicly beheaded for his faith at Delhi by the Emperor Aurangzeb (who had kept harassing the two previous Gurus also).

(10) *Guru Govind Singh* (1666-1708) is the most famous after Nānak. Becoming Guru at the age of nine, he received an excellent training in letters and in the martial arts.

Govind Singh declared that the line of Gurus would end with him. Thereafter the Granth was to be regarded as "the perpetual Guru". He also raised the *Khālsā* (purity) community through a new rite of initiation. In this community of initiates *(Panth)* he wished all the Guru's temporal authority to be vested after his death. As a result, a majority decision of the *Panth's* representatives became binding on all as a *gurumatta* (verdict of the Guru).

C. The Initiation Rite

The initiation rite was created by Govind Singh on the Hindu New Year Day in 1699, when in dramatic circumstances he "baptised" the *Panj Pyārās* (five beloved ones) and was in turn "baptised" by them. All drank sugared water *(amṛt)* stirred by a double-edged dagger *(khanda)* from the same bowl. Thus were abolished social and caste distinctions among the first five—a Brāhmin, a Kṣatriya, and three members of the lower castes.

The initiates were given new names, each with the suffix *Singh* (lion), and they resolved to wear the *five K's:* unshorn hair and beard *(keś)*, comb in the hair *(kaṅgh)*, steel bangle on the right wrist *(karā)*, short drawers *(kacch)*, and sword *(kirpān)*. Four rules of conduct *(rahat)* were also imposed: they had to refrain from cutting their hair, from tobacco and alcoholic drinks, from adulterous relations with Muslim women, and from meat obtained by certain forbidden methods of animal slaughter.

As in Govind Singh's time, so today there are Sikhs who follow the teachings of the *Ādi Granth* without accepting the initiation rite of the last Guru and the external forms it enjoins *(the 5 K's)*. These are called *Sahajdhāris* (easy-goers), and are not considered full-fledged Sikhs like the *Keśadhāris* (hair-wearers). The latter alone enjoy the rights, privileges and obligations of the vast casteless *Khālsā* fraternity in which the men are all called Singh (lion) and the women Kaur (princess).

The *Khalsā* ideal was that of the soldier-saint. Deeply attached, on the one hand, to the peaceful devotional religion of the *Ādi Granth*, they were, on the other, always ready to fight for it like lions—particularly against the Moguls. Nine-tenths of the "Granth of the tenth Guru" *(Daśam Granth)* is militant propaganda material (which Govind Singh caused to be translated from Hindu Epics and Purāṇas), full of spirited tales of battle, soldier-heroes, and war-deities.

"When all other means have failed, it is righteous to draw the sword. Light your understanding as a lamp and sweep away the filth of timidity." With sayings such as these and his own desperate courage, Govind Singh succeeded in "training the sparrow to hunt the hawk and one man to fight a legion." He himself won few military triumphs and finally perished at Muslim hands. But he did succeed in transforming the farmers of the Punjab into fiery warriors who later carved out a Sikh kingdom for themselves under Ranjit Singh.

D. The Ādi Granth: Its Spirit and Doctrine

Blood and battle have no place in the *Ādi Granth*. Here all is serenity and repose, meditation on God's name, purification, and yearning for the Eternal Formless One. Almost the entire work is set to measures of classical Indian music. Its hauntingly beautiful hymns now instruct, now exhort, now express the fervent outpourings of the spirit in quest of God. The hymns are in six languages and vary in their authorship and doctrinal import. This eclectic character makes the *Ādi Granth* a difficult book. And since the Sikhs have no official priesthood, there are not many reliable scholars to help us interpret the book correctly.

In what follows, some cardinal teachings of the Granth are illustrated by representative texts quoted mainly from the recent (1960) translation made by a group of Sikh scholars: *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs* (UNESCO Collection). Page references are to this translation. It is impossible to say how far the translators have been influenced by Christian terminology.

1. *Strong Monotheism*

(a) *One, all-powerful God:* "There is one God, Eternal Truth is His Name; Maker of all things, fearing nothing and at enmity with nothing; Timeless is His Image; Not begotten, being of His own being; By the grace of the Guru made known to men. As He was in the beginning, the Truth; So throughout the ages He ever has been, The Truth; So even now He is Truth Immanent; So for ever and ever, He shall be Truth Eternal" (p.28). These verses are regarded by the Sikhs as their basic belief *(mūl mantra).*

(b) *Idolatry forbidden:* "He cannot be installed like an idol" (p. 31). They who worship strange gods are considered accursed. The Granth does speak of Hindu gods (e.g, Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva), but their function is to serve and bear witness to the Transcendent One.

(c) *True worship:* The truly valid forms of worship are to sing God's praises and to meditate on His "Name". To realise Him speculation is useless; so are pilgrimages and ascetical practices like fasting and celibacy.

(d) *Supremacy of God's Will:* "Through His Will He creates all the forms of things...; By His ordering some are high, some of low estate; Some through His Will are graciously rewarded; Others must grope through births and deaths; Nothing at all outside His Will is abiding. O Nānak, he who is aware of the Supreme Will, never in his selfhood utters the boast: 'It is I' " (p. 29).

(e) *God too great for speech or thought:* "Manifest in all things, He is also the Unmanifest Ground of all things: He is Formless; He is Transcendent" (p. 172). "It is not by thought that He is to be comprehended, though we strive to grasp Him a hundred thousand times" (p. 29). "To sing truly of the Transcendent Lord would exhaust all vocabularies, all human powers of expression" (p. 30). "If anyone dares to claim that he can describe Him, write him down as the greatest fool on earth" (p. 44).

2. *God's Name, the Word and the Guru*

The whole essence of Sikhism lies hidden in texts like: "In thy heart's garden plant, like seeds, the Word of the Guru; And water thy garden with love; And all thy orchards shall bear the precious fruitage of the Holy Name of God. But oh poor helpless man: What can he ever achieve without God's grace?" (p. 85-6.)

God is the Incomprehensible, Indescribable, Formless One. Ordinary mortals cannot reach Him without an intermediary. One such intermediary is the "Name". This is a conviction common to all Bhaktas. Tulasī Dās had said, "The Name acts as an interpreter between the material and immaterial forms of the deity and a guide and interpreter to both." For the Sikh Gurus the "Name" is sometimes used as synonym for God Himself; at other times it stands confusedly for some sort of link with the Incomprehensible God. But the practice (so common among certain Hindu devotees) of mechanically repeating a "Name" did not find favour with the Sikh Gurus. For them, "to take the Name" has rather the sense of praising God, practising God's presence, and remembering Him in the depths of the heart.

Besides the Name, there is another and more concrete substitute for the Incomprehensible One. This is the Guru, i.e., a holy teacher into whose heart God has spoken His "Word". God Himself is the Supreme Guru: *"Satnām, Wāh Guru"* (The True Name, The Wondrous Teacher). Ultimately the ten Gurus are reverenced because the *Wāh Guru* (God) spoke through them. Nānak had no other Guru but God. His followers, however, reach God through Guru Nānak and the other nine —who were all lamps of the same light. And when the line ended, the God-given "Word of the Guru" remained embodied in the Granth and the temporal function of the Guru was bestowed on the *Khālsā.*

3. *Karma, Transmigration, Salvation*

The typical Hindu belief in rebirth due to previous deeds is retained, but it is joined to the typically Muslim idea of God's absolute control. "According to the seed we sow is the fruit we reap. By God's will, O Nānak, man must either be saved or endure new births" (p. 39).

Salvation is conceived as union with God implying escape from the cycle of rebirth. It is attained by God's grace and the destruction of egoism.

> "There can be no peace for man so long as he thinketh that he of himself can do anything; He shall wander from womb to womb in the cycle of births... It is by God's grace that man can be freed from bondage" (p. 168). "Thou hast acquired this human frame; This is thy opportunity to be one with God" (p. 58). "Our own past actions have put this garment on us; But salvation comes only through His grace" (p.31). "Soiled by its former births the soul is black as jet...; But if through the Guru's grace a man die to self and be born to new understanding, then the soul is free from its soiling and is not born again" (p. 134).

4. *God's Will and Man's Freedom*

God and the world are both admitted to be real; God really acts and wills — and so do men. But when it comes to understanding how there can exist, distinct from an omnipotent God, creatures with wills of their own, the Granth resorts to expressions suggestive of Hindu speculation and the *"kismet"* of the Muslims. Similar expressions occur when there is question of describing the state of union of the liberated self with God.

"When God made this illusion, the world, He diffused the three mental states: Stupidity, passion and tranquillity... Self-will, worldly honour and dishonour were set moving by God in innumerable shapes. It is all God's play and God is the spectator: When he lets the curtain fall, there is only God" (pp. 172-173). "Out of himself, Nānak, He made all things; Into himself all things are again absorbed" (p. 172). "Some men beg for alms, some bestow them; All this is the great game Thou playest; It is Thou who givest and enjoyest the gifts; I know of none other beside Thee" (p. 56). "It is all God's game: some reach the shore, some are drowned in life's terrible ocean. Each man dances as the Lord maketh him dance; Each man must pay in suffering for bad deeds" (p. 197).

5. *Rejection of Caste and Caste-Practices*

The Hindu caste system is rejected outright together with its prohibitions regarding food, social contacts, etc.

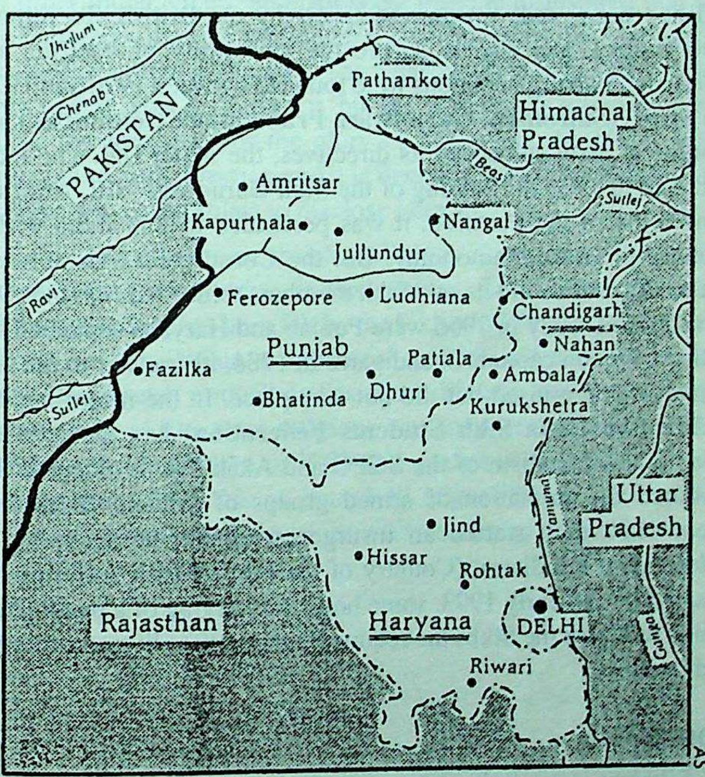
"Let no man be proud of his caste. For the man who graspeth God in his heart, he, no other, is the true Brāhmin...Though they say there are four castes, One God created all men; All men were moulded out of the same clay; The Great Potter hath merely varied the shapes of them" (p. 136).

Women are highly respected and given their rightful place in society and in worship: "How can they be called inferior when they give birth to kings and prophets?" In this conception *satī* (widow-burning) has obviously no place.

E. The History of Sikhism as a Distinct Community

Guru Nānak's disciples were not a really distinct group within Hinduism, but distinction began when he rejected his son Chand (because he had started a quietist sect of ascetics) and appointed his friend Aṅgad as his successor. Aṅgad built up distinctiveness by creating the **gurmukhi** script and popularizing the **laṅgar** (common kitchen) as Amar Dās also did in order to weaken the feeling of caste distinctions. Amar Dās appointed special Sikh feastdays, marriage and funeral ceremonies (discouraging **satī**) and 25 worship circles (**manja**). Rām Dās levied a tithe to finance the completion of the Golden Temple in the midst of the **amritsar** (nectar Tank) and compiled the ***Ādi* Granth.** Sikhism now had its own Book.

Sikhism, however, was distinguishing itself more strongly from Islam than from Hinduism, the source of most of its converts. Being now organized around gurus who had acquired economic and thus some political power, it began to alarm the Mughal rulers. In 1606 Guru Arjun got involved in the rebellion of prince Khusrau against Jahangir, refused to pay the fine and was executed. The next gurus surrounded themselves with armed forces to keep Sikhism independent of both the Mughal emperors and the Hindu Himalayan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rajas. Guru Gobind Singh instituted the military brotherhood of the **khālsā** and endowed it with the inheritance of the guruship and the power of decision for all.

Not all accepted these developments. Many clung to Hinduism. Cow slaughter became prohibited; caste ruled over marriages; the rite of satī was observed at the funeral of Ranjit Singh, the founder of the kingdom of Punjab; image worship reappeared. All this called for a series of reform movements: the **Nirankāri** of Dyāl Dās (1783-1855) and his son Bhāi Dārā; the **Namdhāri** of Sāīn Sāhib (d.1862); then the missionary **Singh Sabhā** and the **Khālsā Tract Society.** Moreover, about that time, the British who were grateful for Sikh aid during the Mutiny began to recruit khālsā Sikhs into the Indian army which took care to protect their special character.

The guardians (**mahant**) of the gurudvāras were often Hindus and had been made revenue receivers by the British. To remove their control, and also to secure the uniformity of doctrine and behaviour, two organizations were founded between 1920 and 1925: the SGPC (**Shiromani Gurudwāra Prabandhak Committee**) and a political party subject to its directives, the **Akāli Dāl.** The latter obtained in 1925 the passing of the Sikh Gurudwāra Bill. After the convulsion of the Partition, it was persuaded to join India with a promise of cultural autonomy. But the Constituent Assembly did not conform to it, and its two Sikh members refused to sign the 1950 Constitution. Only in 1966 were Punjab and Haryana separated but with a common capital, Chandigarh. In 1986, its transfer to the sole Punjab was promised but did not take place. In the meantime, the AISSF (**All India Sikh Students Federation**) had nurtured the basic fundamentalism of the SGPC and Akāli Dāl to a degree that favoured the formation of armed groups of militant separatists. From 1980 they started an insurgency aiming at obtaining an independent **Khālistan** (Country of the Pure). Much suffering has resulted but, in early 1993, some hope is emerging of a pacification which will give the Sikhs the required autonomy to live according to their religion.

Conclusion

Sikhism is a religion of praise of the One God whose Name is True and whose Word enlightens those who receive it through the

Ādi Granth of the ten gurus. Its monotheism is very pure and does away with all intermediaries, whether prophets, avatāras or godly images. The will of God takes account of his creatures' karma but transcends and may bypass it through his mercy. The Granth inculcates doctrine and moral norms with a concreteness and simplicity mingled with the persuasive charm of poetical beauty. All monotheists, Muslims, Jews, Christians as well as Upanishadic ones or Brāhmo-samājis can recognize and appreciate the quality of this faith and the attraction of the hope it conveys. The Sikh bhakti is directed to the Formless One and the devotee is not absolved from the effort of purifying his heart and curbing his will so that he be open to receive God's grace.

What dominates in Guru Nanak's approach to the True One is his sense of His transcendence and ineffability. More perhaps than any other Indian creed, Sikhism is the religion of inspired guesses. The Granth evokes the picture of a man searching for a loved one with a poor lantern in the dark. The weak beam of light will now and again stab at what he looks for, but the momentary glimpse reveals neither the presence nor the glory of him whom he seeks. Yet it points in the right direction and it is from the loved One Himself that the light will come at last to disclose Him.

Less than other monotheistic religions does Sikhism possess a well-systematized doctrine. In this century of encounter with other religions, this lack has been felt by the Sikhs. In 1969, an international seminar held in Patiala to honour the 500th anniversary of Guru Nānak contributed critical studies of his life and teaching; a centre for the study of five main religions was inaugurated; a **Journal of Religious Studies** began in 1982 and a number of excellent books have appeared. All this is bound to align Sikhism on the best elaborated monotheistic doctrines while outlining its specificity.

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Chapter 26

Reform Movements of Modern India

(R. Antoine)

A. The Impact of the West

By the end of the eighteenth century, England had established her dominion over India. In the wake of the foreign political power a strong current of Western ideas soon began to spread and to challenge the traditional ways of thinking. Its ideological challenge left the masses unaffected and was unable to change the religious faith and practices of the multitude. But it stimulated a dynamic minority of educated people to find a new conception of life and to explore the possibilities of building up a new social and religious outlook.

It would be wrong to identify, as is often done, Western influence with Christian influence. In fact, what Europe brought to India was a mixture of Christian values and secular culture. Social progress much more than religious conversion captured the attention. And since the leaders of those days rarely dissociated social progress from religious conceptions, it was only natural that they should seek a remedy to the diseases of Indian society in a critical re-examination of their religious traditions. Nineteenth century Europe was herself passing through a religious crisis and the voices of rationalism and positivism were raised against the so-called passivity of faith. India welcomed the message of rationalism, while, at the same time, learning to cherish Christian ideals which were cut off from their religious moorings. In many cases, the echo of the French revolution had a deeper influence than the tidings of the Gospel. The freedom of the individual, social equality and, eventually, political freedom were the great lessons which India learnt from the West. The nineteenth century is characterised by the fact that those ideals still retained a religious significance which, in the course of time, would gradually disappear in favour of a purely secular approach to human problems.

B. The Reactions

A new awareness of the social evils of traditional Hinduism initiated the work of reform. Western ideas and standards, often idealised, were contrasted with the stagnant misery of Hindu society. Resentment against a tradition which despises innovation and sanctions social inequality soon became articulate. And since the Hindu doctrines claimed to be founded on divine revelation, that claim itself was challenged.

1. ***The free-thinkers.*** In Bengal and some other parts of India, the nineteenth century ushered in a period of critical re-assessment of many traditions, religious as well as social. Young Calcutta students would read with delight Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*; the deism and the atheistic rationalism of the eighteenth century Encyclopedists and other philosophers of the so-called Enlightenment were becoming popular with not a few intellectuals.

In the Hindu College, Calcutta, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31), a brilliant teacher of philosophy, fascinated his pupils and through them many young men far beyond the confines of the College. He urged them to think for themselves. Conservative Hindu society reacted strongly and calumniated him. He died a premature death but his influence continued to shape the minds of many. The first Bengali converts to Christianity Alexander Duff gathered around him were former students and friends of Derozio. Not all the youths whose faith in the old religion and social norms of Hindu society had been shaken by rationalism and atheism had the depth and seriousness of Derozio; some expressed their revolt against tradition in juvenile and provoking manners, some even became libertines and unbelievers.

2. ***The traditionalists.*** At the other extreme, we hear the voice of those who sensed the danger of the new ideals and sounded the alarm. In some cases, the defence of tradition remained peaceful and serene. But, more often, it expressed itself in a fanatical hostility to Western influence and, perpetuating the confusion between Western civilization and Christianity, gave itself the mission to oppose and combat the work of the Church.

3. *The reformers.* Desirous, on the one hand, to preserve the treasures of Indian tradition, and anxious, on the other hand, to make use of the new ideals brought in from the West, the reformers undertook the task of re-vitalising Hinduism by purifying it from the spurious elements gathered throughout its long history. Although they differed greatly among themselves as to what was to be considered spurious, it may be said in general that they agreed on the following two points: fight against narrow orthodoxy and claim to universality. Reformed Hinduism, in the eyes of its protagonists, is not to be counted as one religion among others, but as the universal religion, or as the substratum common to all religions. Often that claim is inspired by a sincere desire of unity among men whom races and castes divide and oppose. It also sometimes appears as an answer and a challenge to the catholicity of the Church.

C. The Reformers of Hinduism

For the sake of clarity, we shall classify the various reformers of Hinduism under three heads: deists and theists; positivists; gnostics. Such divisions are necessarily artificial, as the various currents often overlap. Beyond their didactic value they should not be stressed unduly.

1. *Deists and Theists*

Rājā Rām Mohan Roy (1772-1833). A man of very wide culture, Rām Mohan Roy applied himself to the study of the sacred books of the great religions. His clearly monotheistic convictions and his fierce condemnation of image-worship may have been inspired by his early acquaintance with Islam. Roy's first book, composed in Persian with a preface in Arabic, *Tuhfatul-Muwahidin* (A Present to the Believers in One God), is evidence of his admiration for the Muslims' faith in the unity of God. After reading the Gospels, "he stressed the ethical concept of universal love on the basis of the doctrine of the ethical personality of God" (A.K. Mazumdar). He became the champion of social freedom and fought relentlessly against caste distinctions. He was instrumental in the legal suppression of satī (widow-burning). His religious outlook came to reflect Western Deism and Christian Unitarianism. He saw in the Gospels a precious document containing moral principles able to inspire and purify human conduct. But the miracles and the claims of Christ were not to his taste and he proposed to leave them out in order to keep only those ethical portions which could appeal to all men of good will. Desirous to unite all men in one single faith, he founded the Brāhmo-Samāj (Society of the Worshippers of Brāhman). The tenets of this universal religion were as follows:

— strict monotheism as found in the Upaniṣads;
— the moral teaching of the Gospels;
— rejection of all forms of idolatry and all claims of divine incarnation;
— interpretation of the 'sacred books' under the sole guidance of reason.

Roy considered the establishment of pure monotheism as the supreme mission in his life. For this he had the support of both the Hindu and the Christian Scriptures as well as the deliverance of reason. The universal service of humanity, which is the key-note of his teaching, followed upon his conviction that, as children of the one God, we are all brethren.

His controversy with the Serampore Baptist missionaries, regarding his restricted selection from the Gospels, was unfortunate: Rām Mohan Roy was a sincere admirer of Christ, almost a "Christian Hindu", caught between callous Hindu conservatism and the fundamentalism of those sincere but narrowminded believers in Christ.

Devendranāth Tagore (1817-1905). Devendranāth was the father of the great Poet Rabīndranāth. He succeeded Rām Mohan Roy as head of the Brāhmo-Samāj and transformed this rather loose organisation into a well-knit religious body. He put the Samāj on guard against the following chief dangers: idolatry, which is opposed to the oneness of God; Christianity, which, through faith in Incarnation, compromises the transcendence of God; and monism, which suppresses the distinction between the worshipper and God. His belief in the infallibility of the Vedas was seriously challenged by a group of rationalists belonging to the Brāhmo-Samāj. He answered that challenge by a triple move:

Firstly he published the *Brāhma-Dharma,* an anthology of Upanishadic texts inculcating pure monotheism.

Secondly, he defined the fundamental tenets of natural theism in the Brāhma-Dharma-Bīja: "The Supreme Being alone was in the beginning; nothing else existed, he created all this universe. He is eternal; infinite, all-wise, all-merciful, independent, formless, one without a second, all-pervading, ruling all, all-containing, all-knowing, all-powerful, the permanent, the perfect, the one beyond any comparison. In his worship alone lies our welfare in this world and in the world to come. To love him and to do the works He loves is his worship."

Finally, he gave up his belief in the infallibility of the Vedas and laid stress on the personal character of true religion: "Scriptures are inferior; that is truly superior which enables a man to attain to the Eternal and Immutable Being."

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884). Deeply religious and desirous to share his zeal with many others, Keshab Sen joined the Brāhmo-Samāj in 1857. In 1862, he was ordained minister by Devendranāth Tagore and became the leader of the younger members to whom he communicated his fervour for social reform and religious proselytism. The opposition of the older members who resented the anti-Hindu and pro-Christian leaning of K. Sen gradually led to a division of the Samāj. The schism became official in 1867, when Keshab Sen founded the *Brāhmo-Samāj of India* while Devendranāth remained at the head of the parent organisation, the *Ādi-Brāhmo-Samāj.* The Brāhmo-Samāj of India, assimilated deep Christian values such as the sense of sin and the spirit of prayer. A more emotional mode of worship, inspired from Vaiṣṇava practices, was introduced. Soon Keshab Sen became the object of worshipful reverence and was sternly taken to task by the Ādi-Brāhmo-Samāj: "The right of private judgment is the most glorious privilege of a Brāhmo as compared with the followers of other religions. Disciples should therefore show due veneration towards their teachers but should not make idols of them. The teacher again who reduces his disciples to mere automatons having no will or judgment of their own, is not fit for the post of a religious instructor." But Keshab refused to interfere with the devotion of his disciples and, within his own organisation, signs of a cleavage between two parties soon became visible. They were called the 'sacerdotalists' and the 'secularists'. The latter, afraid of the personal worship rendered to Keshab and some of his missionaries, demanded that the Samāj should be ruled by a definite constitution.

The conflict came to a head when Keshab arranged the Hindu marriage of his daughter with the prince of Cooch-Behar in 1878.

The secularists accused him of having betrayed his Brāhmo principles and they engineered the second schism. Their version of the facts passed into S. Sastri's *History of the Brāhmo Samāj* and, though refuted by Dwijadastta in *Behold the Man*, still found its way into D.C. Scott's book of 1979.

In fact, in accordance with Keshab's pre-arrangements, the marriage ceremony was presided over by a non-Brāhmin Brahmo and performed according to Hindu rites but purged of all idolatrous portions. Keshab performed a Divine Service. The prince had given written undertaking that he was a theist at heart and would not marry twice. Thus all the principles of Keshab were respected.

Nevertheless, the secularists decided to form a separate organization which they called Sādhāran Brāhmo-Samāj. It reverted to the ideals of the Ādi-Samāj, deprecating the cult of personalities and the emotional trends of religious worship. Social reform remained in the foreground, although practical realisations have not been very conspicuous. In spite of its efforts to combine what is best in the East and in the West, it is looked upon by Hindus as a Western type of religion.

While the Brāhmos were a real progressive force during the last century and at the beginning of this century, they are now much on the decline and the fervour of former days has considerably cooled down. They have enriched the devotional literature and hymnology in the vernacular. Some of the devotional songs of Rabīndranāth Tagore are among the best ever produced.

Offshoots of the Brāhmo-Samāj. The *Prārthanā-Samāj* of Bombay came to existence in 1867, after the visit of Keshab Chandra Sen to Bombay. *Govind Rānade* (1842-1901) was the animator of the new society and became the apostle of 'pure theism', rejecting the doctrine of incarnation and making individual conscience the supreme arbiter of religious truth.

The *Poona Prārthanā-Samāj* was founded in 1870 and benefited by the advent of Govind Rānade. It was in Poona that *Shivarām Narāyaṇ Gokhale* exercised most of his missionary zeal. He is the founder of the *Servants of India Society.*

In Madras, the *Veda Samāj* was founded in 1864 by Mr Rajagopalachariar and S. Chetty. The greatest apostle of the new faith was Shridharulu Naidu who, after a visit to Calcutta, returned to Madras and began spreading the Brāhmo message by means of popular songs.

2. *Positivists.*

The social reforms advocated by the Brāhmo-Samāj were not intimately connected with the religious faith of the Samājists. In fact, their theism, whether of the intellectual type (Devendranāth and Rānade) or of the emotional type (Keshab Sen), invited a small elite to a deep personal devotion to the one true God, but had no direct social message to give. To make of social reform a living religion, the centre of attraction had to be transferred from God to man. It was the Religion of Mankind which had to enkindle the hearts; too much devotion made real action impossible. India had to regain her manliness and Indians had to be directed in the paths of freedom and independence.

Īśvara Candra Vidyāsāgar (1820-1891). His life is given to all Bengali boys as the example of sincerity and fortitude. Born in a poor Brāhmin family, he succeeded by sheer determination in educating himself and specialised, among other things, in Hindu law *(smṛti).* He was no mystic, and if he joined the Brāhmo-Samāj, it was not out of devotion to the Supreme but because the social programme of the Samāj appealed to him. He was one of the young progressists who caused much anxiety to Devendranāth. Those young men would discuss the attributes of God, and, at the end of the meeting, the nature of God was decided by show of hands. Vidyāsāgar left the Brāhmo-Samāj and began a life-campaign against the abuses of orthodox Hinduism. But his method was new: far from denouncing Hinduism and the ancient books, he used his vast erudition to prove that the sacred books in no way sanctioned the prevailing abuse. His controversies with the leading 'pandits' of the day have remained legendary. He quoted the authority of the old law books in support of widow-marriage and fought till the end of his life for an enlightened interpretation of the ancient tradition. He had important followers who perfected his method and tried to modernise Hinduism without attacking it.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894.) Justly famous as the leading Bengali novelist and the author of the national anthem '*Vande Mātaram*', Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is less known as a religious reformer. Well acquainted with the works of Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, he drew from them much of his religious philosophy. As an educated Hindu, he found himself ill at ease between the emancipated and the orthodox. On the one hand, English education had become the means to obtain government posts and those who succeeded in that line were gradually losing their Indian individuality. On the other hand, the orthodox, blissfully ignorant of the dynamism contained in the new ideas, remained in a state of social inertia. Bankim, therefore, set about synthesising Hindu and Western values in such a way as to re-awaken among the educated the sense of their national dignity and to prove to the orthodox that Hinduism, far from losing, would gain much by assimilating the new ideals.

The main structure of his thought can be summarised as follows:

—Man needs religion. But what is religion? It is not a set of dogmas claiming the authority of revelation, but a merely human quest, "the perfect and complete development of all human faculties." In that quest, man is led to project outside himself the image of the perfect man in whom 'humanity' *(manuṣyatva)* finds its ideal realisation. That perfect image of man is God.

—Where should we look for the ideal man? Not abroad, but at home, in Hinduism. Hinduism is not a revealed religion, but it is the summit of human wisdom. Throughout the centuries, it has grown, incorporating the intuitions and experiences of many generations, but also the errors and deviations of misguided mankind. The main error is that which consists in attributing without any discrimination the character of divine revelation to all that was written or handed down. As a consequence of that error the human mind had become the slave of a blind and baseless faith. Reason must reassert its rights and, through reason, Hinduism must be purified.

—Rejecting all that is 'supernatural', all the miracles and mythological exaggerations, Bankim tries to reconstruct an image of Kṛṣṇa which embodies the fullness of mankind: Kṛṣṇa the lover, the husband, the warrior, the friend, the peace maker, the guru. In him, all the human potentialities have found their expression. He is the ideal, the 'God', whom men must adore as the perfect image of what they aspire to become.

Svāmi Vivekānanda (1863-1902). Narendranāth Datta was at first a member of the Brāhmo-Samāj. After meeting Rāmakrishna, he became the herald of a modernized Vedānta. An exposition of his views and reformist work will be given in the next chapter.

The normal evolution of the positivist tendency to centre everything on man leads to a growing secularism. Resounding formulae about the divinity hidden in man and the necessity to allow that divinity... to appear and shine forth, contain little more than a simple affirmation of human self-sufficiency. The religious values of prayer, repentance and surrender are looked upon as weaknesses of the unenlightened and causes of human inertia in the great task of rebuilding a society and a nation which need more virility and less self-abasement. The importance of this positivist message in the development of modern India has been and remains great.

3. *Modernists and Gnostics.*

The tendency of the Positivists was to subordinate the spiritual to the temporal. Other reformers tried to safeguard the primacy of spiritual values. Although their interpretation of what they like to call "the Religion of the Spirit" may not be acceptable, they have been authentic witnesses of the Spirit in the midst of modern secularism.

Mohandās Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948). The personality of Mahātmā defies classification. There are so many aspects in his life, doctrine and work that they resist all attempts at a clearly defined systematisation. A special chapter will be devoted to him.

Śri Aurobindo (1872-1950). His reinterpretation of Hinduism on the base of Yoga will be expounded in the next chapter.

Sarvapalli Rādhākrishnan (1888-1975). The religious thought of S. Rādhākrishnan will be exposed in the next chapter.

Ānanda K. Coomārasvāmy (1877-1947). Born in Ceylon, educated in England and, after a short return to Ceylon, definitely settled in America (Boston), Ānanda K. Coomārasvāmy was a well-known authority on oriental art. As a religious philosopher, he expressed in a very serene and detached manner the fundamental positions of Indian gnosticism. For him, a clear distinction must be made between religion and wisdom. Religions are only symbolical interpretations of the basic truth of wisdom. For instance, what a religious man calls 'revelation' is for him a message of God, whereas, for the wise man, 'revelation' is the fruit of a supra-rational intuition which carries in itself its own infallibility. Religion demands self-surrender, whereas wisdom leads to self-realisation. Religion supposes the help of divine grace, whereas wisdom teaches man to discover his own divinity. The conclusion drawn by A. Coomārasvāmy is the following:

> "If we are to consider what may be the most urgent *practical* problem to be resolved by the philosopher, we can only answer that this is to be recognised in a control and revision of the principle of comparative religion, the true end of which science, judged by the best wisdom, should be to demonstrate the common metaphysical basis of all religions and that diverse cultures are fundamentally related to one another as being the dialects of a common and

spiritual language; for whoever recognises this, will no longer wish to assert that "My religion is best," but only that it is the "best for me". In other words, the purpose of religious controversy should be, not to "convert" the opponent, but to persuade him that his religion is essentially the same as our own."

(On the Pertinency of Philosophy, in Contemporary Indian Philosophy, p.121.)

How widely spread is the view just exposed, anybody who has entered into conversation with educated Indians on the matter of religion will easily realise. The Rāmakrishna Mission has taken as one of its main objectives to spread the universal religion which lies hidden beneath the diversity of religions. The real danger of that position is what lies hidden in the so-called universal religion, viz., the implicit denial of the supernatural, of the divine initiative which fulfils man's spiritual aspirations, and the implicit affirmation of man's spiritual self-sufficiency. Among the books which propose the adoption of the 'universal religion,' a most representative one is *Vedānta for Modern Man* where, besides several Svāmis of the Rāmakrishna Mission, a group of laymen develop diverse aspects of the doctrine. Among those lay philosophers the best known are Christopher Isherwood, Gerald Heard, Alan W. Watts, Aldous Huxley, S, Rādhakrishnan and John van Druten.

Such are the main trends of modern reformism in Hinduism. It is difficult to exaggerate the influence which those reformers have exercised and still exercise on the religious attitude of the educated classes. One of the main effects of that influence is religious indifferentism. If religion in its true reality is nothing but a vague internal attitude towards an undefined Absolute, then whatever man may believe and practise is altogether secondary, and the less he believes and practises, the closer he gets to the real core of religion. As it is given only to very few to have a direct experience of the Absolute, the majority is thus left in a kind of spiritual vacuum which is, at first, welcome as a liberation but gradually leaves the soul unsatisfied until it has found a substitute for religion in some sort of faith able to give a positive orientation to life.

D. The Traditionalists

Side by side with the reformers, there were also traditionalists who, though not altogether untouched by the new ideas, were stressing the necessity of safeguarding the ancient traditions against modern rationalism. It is impossible to give here a detailed account of the various personalities and movements concerned with the preservation of traditional Hinduism. What follows is meant to give only a sketchy illustration by providing a few typical examples.

1. ***Serene traditionalism:*** *Rāmana Mahārshi* (1879-1950). Venkataram Aiyar was born in South India and educated in the High School of the American Mission at Madura. When he was seventeen, he had a deep experience in which his real self appeared to him as detached from, and independent of, his body. He left everything and began to seek the place where his soul could find peace. He settled down at last near Tiruvannamalai, at the foot of the Arunachala hill. Disciples gathered around the young hermit and an ashram was founded. Venkataram was called Rāmana Mahārshi by his followers. He never professed to be a philosopher but remained satisfied with the simple devotion of a Bhakta and the austerity of a penitent. There was a peculiar blending in him of the monist and the bhakta, as the following prayer shows:

> My erring spirit will stop its mad rush if I find Thee. Reveal thy beauty and I shall be fascinated by it..I have come to feed on Thee, but it is Thou that feedest on me, and now peace has come down upon me..O limitless ocean of grace and light, through thy contact all duality disappears, there is neither within nor without, neither good nor evil, neither life nor death, neither pain nor pleasure, neither light nor darkness.

2. ***Syncretist traditionalism:*** *Paramahamsa Rāmakrishna* (1836-1886). The study of Rāṁakrishna's life and message will be found in the next chapter.

3. ***Militant traditionalism:*** *Svāmi Dayānanda Sarasvatī* (1824-1883). Mūla Shanker was born in Kathiawar in an orthodox shaivite family. From his adolescence, he revolted against idolatry, left his family and began his life of a wandering monk. His meeting with Virajānanda Sarasvatī gave him his definite orientation. From his master, Dayānanda learnt that popular Hinduism with its idolatry was a caricature of real Hinduism. He then began to preach the infallibility of the Vedas and to denounce the false traditions incorporated in the Purāṇas. In 1875, he founded the *Ārya Samāj* as a universal religion open to everyone, regardless of caste, colour or nationality. To become a member one had to subscribe to the ten fundamental principles:

1. God is the primary cause of all true knowledge.
2. God is absolutely perfect. To him alone worship is due.
3. The Vedas are the Books of true knowledge.
4. An Ārya must be ready to accept truth and to reject untruth.
5. All actions must conform to virtue.
6. The objective of the Ārya Samāj is to improve the physical, spiritual and social condition of mankind.
7. All ought to be treated with love and justice.
8. Ignorance must be dispelled.
9. Selfishness must be discarded.
10. The common good must prevail over the individual interest.

In 1892, a split in the Ārya Samāj arose on the question of meat diet. The vegetarian party realised that the ten principles, except for the belief in the infallibility of the Vedas, were too vague and undefined and that effective propaganda demanded a definite creed. They wanted to avoid "the formlessness of Hindu polytheism, on the one hand, and the weak eclecticism of such reformed sects as the Brāhmo-Samāj, on the other." Thus the Ārya Samāj soon became a sect with a definite creed containing among others the doctrine of Karma and rebirth, and pledged to social uplift of the masses. It is strongly organised on the various levels: local, provincial and national. It has developed an anti-foreign policy and has instituted the ceremony of *śuddhi,* i.e., the reclaiming of those who have left Hinduism and the conversion of anyone who is preparing to accept its principles. The fear of Christianity has much to play in the militant character of the Ārya Samāj: "The Hindu religion, which could well withstand the steel of Mahomedan bigotry for hundreds of years, has been brought face to face with European science and criticism, wielded by the hands of men who are either indifferent to our interests or interested in converting us to their faith. Our situation demands that we brace our nerves to defend our religion, if we believe it to be true, against the attacks of its assailants." The militant character of the Ārya Samāj is well expressed by the historian of the sect, Lajpat Rai: "The greater the activities of the Christian missionaries to convert India to Christianity, the greater the chance of the Ārya Samāj to work, to struggle and to thrive. In the words of the Rev. C.F. Andrews, the Ārya Samāj has been from the first 'decidedly militant in spirit and policy;' for the simple reason that it has two militant Churches to counteract, viz., Islam and Christianity. Any increase in the activities of the latter is its chance and from its past history we may safely conclude that it is not likely to miss it" (*The Ārya Samāj,* p. 271).

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Chapter 27

Śrī Rāmakrishna, Swāmi Vivekānanda, Sarvepalli Rādhākrishnan

(P. Fallon)

Śrī Aurobindo

(J. Feys)

The saintly priest of Dakṣineśvar, Śrī Rāmakrishna (1836-1886) was a true heir to the long tradition of jñāna and bhakti which gave to India Jñāneśvar and Tukārām, Tulasīdās and Kabīr, Caitanya and Rāmaprasāda. The ecstatic devotee of Kālī, whom he used to address as "Mother", was a whole-hearted *sadhaka* (seeker of perfection), not a scholarly paṇḍit. It was his personal experience of the Divine which he communicated to those who sought his guidance. He did it in a language that was homely, full of comparisons and strikingly moving. A cultural effervescence had seized Bengal in those days: traditional values and beliefs were being critically re-assessed; the Hindu heritage was being challenged and imperilled by the inroads of rationalism, positivism and agnosticism. Rāmakrishna, absorbed in his spiritual quest, was for years marginal to the movements which agitated the intelligentsia. But, without seeking fame or even recognition, he was "discovered" by Keshab C. Sen who brought him his disciples, followed by many others. During the last ten years of his too short life, he became to many a confidant, a friend and an inspiring guru.

Among those truth-seekers, a young man, Narendranāth Datta, was completely won and transformed by his encounters with that simple priest. He was to be his special heir and, as Swāmi

Vivekānanda, the founder of the Rāmakrishna Math and Mission, the modern Order of Saṅnyāsins who follow and propagate the ideals of Śrī Rāmakrishna.

Two prominent Indian philosophers, Sarvepalli Rādhākrishnan and Śrī Aurobindo, owed much of their inspiration to the personality and writings of Sw. Vivekānanda. His work is being continued in and outside India by the Rāmakrishna Mission with its many institutions, publications and the personal sādhana of its monks.

A. Rāmakrishna Paramahaṁsa (1836-1886)

Born on Feb. 18, 1836, at Kamarpukur (Hugli Dt.), Gadahār Chatterjee, son of Khudirām, a village Brāhmin, received little formal education but imbibed the religiosity of his family and village with its yearly cycle of pūjās and festivals, religious dramas *(yātrā)* and the recitation of the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and Bhāgavata Purāṇa by itinerant *kathākas* (bards), the visits of *sādhus* and other holy men. All this, but above all, the influence of his pious mother, Chandra, shaped the mind and heart of her growing son.

When reading the accounts of his childhood and boyhood, one is struck by the total absence of narrow sectarianism in his family and village: Rāma was the tutelary deity of the Chatterjee family; the goddess Sitalā was daily worshipped in their home; Mahādeva Śiva was the object of a very special adoration; the Hymns of the Śākta poets Rāmaprasāda and Kasalākānta in honour of Kālī, as well as the autumn celebrations of the Durgāpūjā and the Kālīpūjā were part of the religious life of the Chatterjees and, from his childhood, Gadāhar-Rāmakrishna learned to invoke Kālī with a filial love.

At the age of 16, he came to Calcutta to help his elder brother in his work as a *purohita*. Three years later, he was appointed temple-priest in the newly built Kālī temple of Dakṣineśvar on the bank of the Gaṅgā, a few miles north of Calcutta. There followed years of intense *sādhanā* (spiritual quest): while attending faithfully to his priestly duties, he lived a life of utmost detachment and austerity; he spent long hours in absorption, eagerly craving for a personal experience of the divinity; he had visions of Kālī, Sītā and other deities; ecstasy would frequently occur, leaving him senseless, overcome by a mystic trance. In 1859, his relatives, afraid lest he might become mad, persuaded him to get married. He was almost 24 years old. The bride he chose, Sāradā, was only 6 years old; she therefore remained in her parents' home and joined him only ten years later in Dakṣineśvar.

In 1861, a Brāhmin woman belonging to a Tantrika Vaiṣṇava tradition, became his motherly guide and took him through long Tantra practices for over ten years; she both venerated him as an avatāra and taught him Yoga and Tantrika ways of *nivṛtti* (detachment from activity) and *vairāgya* (detachment).

In 1864, a Vedānti *saṅnyāsi,* Totāpuri, initiated him to non-dualistic sādhana and concentration on the Formless (*nirākāra* and *nirguṇa*) Brahman. In his unrelenting resolve to experiment all the methods of spiritual realization, he did for a time impersonate Rādhā so as to concentrate on Kṛṣṇa with single-hearted love. For a few days, he adopted the outward ways of Muslim devotees and, erasing all thought of Hindu deities, he repeated incessantly the name of Allah and held cordial conversation with a Sufi guest. After seeing a lovely picture of the Infant Jesus in his Mother's arms, he concentrated for three days on this image and experienced a prolonged ecstasy.

From 1872, Sāradā agreed to live with her husband a life of continence and devotion. Rāmakrishna had remained unknown to the world. In 1875, the then leader of the Brāhmo Samāj, Keshab Chandra Sen, "discovered" him and a very deep spiritual friendship grew between the two men. Keshab, in those days, was a leading figure in the Calcutta intellectual and religious world. Many of the best young men were his enthusiastic followers. Keshab was profoundly impressed by the holiness, the purity of life, the ardent devotion to the divine Mother of the priest of Dakṣineśvar. He wrote in *The Indian Mirror* (23.3.1875): "We met one [a sincere Hindu devotee] not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never-ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged, are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of his mind are the very opposite to those of Pandit Dayānanda Sarasvati, the former being as gentle, tender and contemplative as the latter is sturdy, masculine and polemical. Hinduism must have in it a deep sense of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these."

This first meeting was followed by many more, either in Dakṣineśvar or in Calcutta where Rāmakrishna was again and again invited by Keshab and other Brāhmo friends. The two men were extremely different in everything except their common dedication to God. Keshab represented the new urban aristocracy, modern intelligentsia, a class perfectly familiar with the English language and Western learning, a religious movement committed to uncompromising monotheism and social welfare, Upanishadic spirituality and Christian ethics. Rāmakrishna represented village India and its traditions, a world so far untouched by Western ideas and ignorant of foreign languages, the perennial *(sanātana)* orthodoxy with its exuberant mythologies and mystic sādhanās. The meeting between these two men undoubtedly enriched spiritually both of them; it also brought Rāmakrishna into a close contact with many friends and young disciples of Keshab; they were attracted by the warmth and genuineness of Rāmakrishna's devotion. Several of those young men who later were to become the first members of the Belur Math (the Swāmis Vivekānanda, Sāradānanda, Rāmakrishnānāda, Brahmānanda, Abodhānanda) were actually initiated as brahmacaris by Rāmakrishana.

From 1882 to 86, when he died on August 16, Rāmakrishna, in between his more and more frequent hours or days of ecstatic samādhi and in spite of the progress of his throat cancer, did not stop welcoming and instructing visitors of all age, social rank or degree of realization.

Besides the accounts published by disciples and hagiographers, we have those written by Keshab Sen, Pratāp Mazumdar, Śivanāth Śāstri, Bhavāni Charan Banerjea (later well-known by his baptismal name Brahmabāndhav Upādhyāya). The latter wrote in 1897: "We were for a long time in personal contact with Paramahaṁsa Rāmakrishna. We admired him and loved him, and it is no exaggeration to say that we were loved in return. The sense of sin was very acute in him. Often we heard him earnestly supplicating God for forgiveness and mercy..." In 1951, a venerable Hindu friend of mine (he was 86 years old then), who in his youth had often gone to Dakṣineśvar with other Presidency college students, told me with tears in his eyes: "he was a great and holy man, a humble man in love with God, a man of prayer, poor and detached, pure and simple, a saint..."

This saint himself never wrote anything about himself. The first official biography, *Life of Shri Krishna Līlāprasaṅga* by Sw. Sāradānanda was published in 1911-18. Sw. Sāradānanda (Sarat

Chandra Chakravarti 1868-1918) was in 1883 a St. Xavier's College student and a member of the Brāhmo Samāj. He was one of the first young Brāhmos to be initiated by the Master in June 1886; he had started going to him in November 1883. A very important source is the *Kathāmṛta* composed by M. (=Mahendranath Gupta). It appeared in successive parts in 1902, 1904, 1908, 1910 and 1932 and was translated into English by Sw. Nikhilānanda under the title *The Gospel of Rāmakrishna* (New York, 1942). This "Elixir of Stories" is said to be based on a diary in which M. is reported to have recorded day by day the conversations and actions of the Master from 1882 to 1886. It is undoubtedly a great work of art and loving devotion which makes us live from day to day with the holy man and his visitors. It also contains many things which he and those close to him related to M. about previous events in his life and sādhanā.

It is certain that Rāmakrishna was a God-seeking, a God-loving man. With God's grace he gave to all of us examples and lessons of great price through his utmost detachment, purity of life, prayerful contemplation, and through the respectful love and kindness he showed to all those who approached him, irrespective of caste, social rank or religious community.

He was a very humble man; he never allowed anyone to worship him as if he were more than a simple mortal. It is after his death that some of his devotees exalted him to the rank of *avatāra*. But let us note that the term *avatāra* is extremely polyvalent: it applies to so many personages, mythical as well as historical, even to material objects and images, that it seems to signify any theophany or any person or object in which divine greatness or power become manifest. It does not correspond to the Christian concept of God-Man or Incarnation in the Christian creeds. Even when applied to a holy man, it remains ambiguous. A Muslim may revere Rāmakrishna as a *pīr, nabī* or *paygambar,* a Christian may venerate him as a saint, but they cannot *adore* him since that kind of worship is to be addressed to God alone.

B. Swāmi Vivekānanda (1863-1902)

Swāmi Vivekānanda died about 90 years ago; his life belongs to a period of our national history already long past. Yet his influence is still very great over large numbers of our countrymen. For many Hindus today, Hinduism means the "dynamic religion" which the Swāmi preached. His books are read by numerous readers all over India, his monks carry on his work and spread his message. Religiously and socially, Vivekānanda's *presence* is not a thing of the past.

Narendranāth Datta was born on January 12, 1863 in an educated middle-class family of North-Calcutta. As a college student (Presidency College, 1879; then, Scottish Church College,) he became an enthusiastic member of the Sādhāraṇ Brāhmo-Samāj. A keen reader of Mill, Hume, Spencer, he went through a period of deep religious scepticism. But in 1881, he met for the first time the saintly Rāmakrishna to whom Keshab had brought him. In 1884, he passed the B.A. examination, but the death of his father in the same year brought about a serious family crisis and the young man had to face bitter struggles. After many a mental conflict, he attached himself to Rāmakrishna who initiated him into *sannyāsa.* During the last two years of the Master's life, he became the favourite and most intimate of his disciples. It is he who, after their Master's death in 1886, gathered some of them into a first brotherhood.

In 1888, he started on a long wandering through the whole of India. At one time, he spent months living in a Himalayan cave; he also mixed with the most diverse people, sweepers from Central India, Rajput princes, Mahratta pandits, Sikhs, Jains, Hindus of all castes; this pilgrimage took him as far as Kanyā Kumāri. In 1893, he decided to attend the newly started Parliament of Religions in Chicago. After being lionized there, he toured the States, lecturing and recruiting some disciples. From there he sailed for England, spoke in London to little groups of earnest listeners, but after a few months only, went back to America in the winter of 1895. He organized the *Vedānta Society of New York.* He entertained great hopes of converting the West. He visited England once more, then France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy. In December 1896, he left Europe and was received like a triumphant conqueror by his Indian countrymen. In 1897, he organized the *Rāmakrishna Mission* and, in 1898, established the *Belur Math.* He left once again for the West where he stayed one and a half years. Back in India in December 1900, he soon fell ill and died on July 4, 1902. He was not 40 years old but he had been a powerful inspirer and awakener. He left an organized group of modern sannyasins to carry on his religious and social activity. Their Order is vowed to the ideals of Śrī Rāmakrishna as Swāmiji had interpreted them.

Swāmi Vivekānanda's religious enthusiasm, his zeal for social reform, his ardent nationalism, his fiery oratory, his evident selflessness and purity of life, made a deep impression upon all those who came in contact with him. He did much to turn the minds of Hindus towards social service and humanitarian work; he tried to infuse into Vedānta a positive and dynamic ethics; he gave back to many Hindus a sense of pride in their own religious traditions.

He has been compared by some to St. Paul. In many respects the comparison is interesting: converted after a long inward struggle, he spent many years in solitude and meditation (like Paul in the Arabian desert after his conversion on the road to Damascus); then he, like him, started on long journeys of predication, wrote countless letters and organized in several countries groups of disciples; he broke down the barriers that kept Hinduism isolated from the outer world and received within its fold "Gentiles" recruited from alien societies, without, however, imposing upon them the traditional restrictions and social observances; a deeply personal devotion towards his Guru sustained and inspired his whole life and work.

Other writers, focusing on the "Bengali Renaissance", rather compared him to Martin Luther. Like him, the Swāmi was profoundly emotional, passionate and fiery in his denunciation of materialism and all kinds of abuses and superstitions to restore the purity of Hinduism. Like Luther, he had also been a national figure and inspired an ardent nationalism in his countrymen. Besides, he had been a tireless commentator of the Hindu Scriptures who opposed Brāhmanic conservatism and orthopraxy. Indeed, he certainly had some traits in common with the German reformer.

These comparisons, however, cannot be more than superficial. The dynamic humanism of the Swāmi had in fact little in common with the Mystery of faith preached by St. Paul; his constant exaltation of man's innate divinity and strength is diametrically opposed to that absolute surrender of the believer to God's grace which Luther advocated as the only hope for fallen and corrupted human nature. The deism of the Brāhmo-Samāj and the Comtist positivism of his student days seem to have marked him deeply. His message, lofty and generous though it was, is more ethical and philosophical than religious; there is little room for genuine transcendence in this humanitarian spirituality.

Swāmi Vivekānanda's central idea was the affirmation of man's essential divinity which he found in the Upaniṣads read in the light of the late advaitins. He translated it into a thousand formulas which emphasized man's natural greatness, strength and dignity. As Sister Nivedita says in *The Master as I Saw Him,* he used to say, "I have never quoted anything but the Vedas and Upaniṣads, and from them only that: the word *strength*" (p. 225). And again, "The longer I live, the more I think that the whole thing is summed up in manliness" (p. 229). He wished Hinduism to become dynamic: "His object, as regards India, said the Swāmi, had always been to make Hinduism aggressive. The eternal Faith must become active and proselytizing, capable of sending out special missions, of making converts, of taking back into her fold those of her own children who had been perverted from her, and of the conscious and deliberate assimilation of new elements" (p. 230). This aggressiveness was to be constructive: religion and spirituality were to come out into the open to manifest themselves in deeds of service and social uplift. *Jñāna-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga* were valueless if not accompanied by *karma-yoga,* i.e., selfless work, social, educational, national. The religious Order which he founded has remained true to this ideal of spiritual philanthropy and constructive aggressiveness.

For a Christian, unreserved admiration for Swāmiji has been made difficult by many of the things he said and wrote about Christ and Christianity. No doubt, he professed a deep admiration and veneration for Christ, especially in his youth. He found inspiration in the book, *The Imitation of Christ,* and even translated a few chapters from it. He made his own some central Christian ideas and values. But his knowledge of Christianity was superficial. He came in contact with numerous Christians and spent some five years touring the "Christian" countries, but that was at the end of the last century at a time when Western Christianity was passing through a great crisis; Protestant liberals and Catholic modernists were highly vocal, "scientism" prevailed in many universities, the majority of the Orientalists were positivists adverse to Christianity. Besides, the Christians of the West in those days had not yet begun to doubt the validity of the colonialist and imperialist claims of the colonial nations. When he came finally back, he had lost his earlier belief in the historical Christ and the Gospel; he was filled with contempt for the materialism of the Western people and indignation against the complacent arrogance of many Westerners. He often denounced and condemned, with a severity that was as sincere as it was in fact unjust, the whole West, globally, onesidedly; he had admired its strength, he had seen but little of its spirituality and faith.

In spite of Swāmi Vivekānanda's open rejection of Christ and Christianity, a Christian student of his life and message cannot but feel that this protagonist of Neo-Hinduism had assimilated many Christian ideas and incorporated them into his religious programme for the reform of Hinduism. His insistence on service and love, his respect for the poor and downtrodden, his ideal of a monasticism that unites action with contemplation, and his idea of an all-inclusive Hindu "Church", his advice to re-write the life of his Master after the pattern of the Gospels are sufficient evidence of this absorption process. Many who feel powerfully attracted by his message may be in fact attracted unwittingly by those Christian elements that have been vitally integrated within that very message. How not to praise divine Providence when we observe this gradual leavening-up of Hinduism under the influence of the Christian ideas and values thus absorbed.

C. Sarvepalli Rādhākrishnan (1888-1975)

A brilliant and original exponent of Neo-Hinduism, an accomplished writer and persuasive orator, a genial diplomat and statesman, a man of vast culture and a philosopher "steeped in the waters of modern thought", Radhakrishnan ranked among the great personalities of 20th century India.

However much we disagree with his religious and philosophical ideas, and however deeply we regret his systematic opposition to Christianity, to Catholicism in particular, we must acknowledge that he has, all through his life, boldly stood against all forms of materialism, "scientism" and earth-bound humanism. He has been the 'liaison officer' between India and the West, untiringly trying to raise the prestige of Indian thought and culture and to defend them against the unfair attacks of ununderstanding critics. He has powerfully contributed to create a new interest in the ancient philosophies of India both in the West, where his books are too often considered as the best exposition of Indian Thought, and in India, where he has held the most important chairs of Philosophy, founded the Indian Philosophical Congress and brought about a great revival of philosophical studies. Knighted by the English Government, Fellow of the British Academy, Professor at Oxford, he was all along a thorough Indian nationalist; loaded with honours by all Indian Universities, and elected President of his country, he never stopped inveighing against social abuses and religious fanaticism. His influence has been considerable; his numerous books have been widely read by educated Hindus, especially the more westernised intellectuals.

In his autobiographical work, *My Search for Truth,* R. explained how, as a young student, he had been roused by the eloquence of Swāmi Vivekānanda and felt the desire to vindicate Hinduism against its detractors. Born in 1888, he was educated in various Protestant institutions at Tirupati, Vellore and Madras; a keen student of Philosophy, he resented the fact that, in these days, "the philosophy courses for the B.A. and the M.A. degree in Madras University did not demand any acquaintance with the Indian systems of thought and religion." Vedānta was not considered worth studying, and foreigners as well as Indians were uncritically levelling unfair charges against it: amoralism, acosmism, lack of logic, etc. The young Telugu Brāhmin disliked the missionaries' criticisms while, at the same time, imbibing much of the Protestant liberalism and the neohegelian idealism then in vogue in Indian and English intellectual circles. His first work was a thesis on *The Ethics of the Vedānta,* an apologetic attempt to defend Hindu Philosophy against its critics. This apologetic attitude was to dominate the thinking of R. for many years and somewhat condition his study of Indian systems. A student of Bradley and Bosanquet, a rationalist idealist and religious modernist, he tried to re-interpret and revitalise Hindu thought in relation to 19th century Western thought, introducing into Hinduism many elements of dubious philosophical and religious value that were foreign to the Hindu tradition. While determined to vindicate Vedānta, he approached the study of Hindu philosophy without possessing either the full Sanskrit learning or the traditional Hindu training necessary for an objective understanding of the classical Indian darśanas. The result has often been a near-identification of Hinduism and Vedānta with naturalistic religion and rationalistic idealism; according to R.'s interpretation, the traditional 'tolerance' of the religious-minded Hindus is to be identified with 19th century agnosticism and the religious indifferentism of Christian modernists. As Vivekānanda's Vedānta is, to a large extent, Comtist Positivism in a Hindu garb, so Radhakrishnan's Vedānta is, on the whole, but a brilliant transposition of Western Idealism and Liberal Protestantism, metaphysically poor and religiously relativistic.

R. professes to be the most tolerant of men regarding all philosophical and religious traditions. In fact, his very tolerance is passionately intolerant of all creeds, of all religious institutions as also of all metaphysical systems that lay claim to any absolute intellectual truth. His description of Christian Faith amounts to a caricature, and his presentation of the history of the Christian Religion, based as it is on the works of Gibbon, Lecky, Couchoud, Loisy and other determined enemies of the Christian Church, is nothing but a bitter and unfair indictment. He has systematically ignored all traditional Christian philosophers and theologians, having respect only for the Christian Mystics whom he re-interprets according to the preconceived idea that Mysticism is beyond Faith and Dogma, being common in its essence to all religious traditions.

His claim that all religions are true only as the local and particular embodiments of the one universal Religion which is beyond and above all creeds, institutions and traditions is, in fact, from the Hindu point of view, a very ingenious and tactically successful way of establishing the superiority of Hinduism as interpreted by neo-Hindus.

A Christian theologian, discussing R.'s views, in a book called *Preface to Personality,* wrote these lines: "Of all the Indian philosophical thinkers, he is probably the best known in the West. He has been deeply influenced by Christian and Western thought and in his writings presents a revitalised Hinduism in relation to those types of thoughts... Radhakrishnan's language is very ambiguous. He freely uses terminology, which in Christian thought connotes something else, to justify to men the ways of the Vedānta. Although at the time of reading it is very lucid and pleasant, yet when all factors have been taken into consideration the result is ambiguity. There is an underlying confusion or vacillation running through the system of Radhakrishnan. The Eastern framework has not quite obtained a creative synthesis with the content of Western science.."

Of Radhakrishnan, and of Neo-Hinduism as a whole, it can be said that Hinduism, Christianity and secular Western Thought meet here in a syncretistic attempt to find an answer to the challenge presented by Western Philosophy and Christian Religion to the traditional thought and spirituality of India. Syncretism is no synthesis; this attempt, however brilliant and no doubt sincere, is at present more and more severely criticised both by Hindu scholars and by Western Indologists.

This became quite manifest during the international seminar which took place in Delhi on February 14-17, 1989, to honour the centenary of his birth. While his greatness was celebrated by all, many of the contributing scholars were rather critical concerning important features of his thought.

D. Śrī Aurobindo (1872-1950)

(Jan Feys)

1. *Biography*

Aravinda Ghose was born in Calcutta on 15th August, 1872, the son of a physician. His entire education was Western: first at Loretto Convent School, Darjeeling, and then — from the age of 7 to 21 — in England. In the home of the Reverend W.H. Drowett the young Aravinda gained whatever little knowledge he ever had regarding Christianity. In London, and later at Cambridge, he showed remarkable proficiency in the Greek and Latin Classics. He returned to India in 1893.

The next thirteen years were spent at Baroda in the service of the Maharaja, first in an administrative capacity, later in Baroda College. Aravinda now made a determined effort to assimilate his Indian cultural heritage. His interest was in Sanskrit literature, more in particular the Mahābhārata and Kālidāsa. There was an increasing involvement in the Freedom Movement: Aravinda's first political article appeared in 1893. In 1905, the year of the Partition of Bengal, he published his revolutionary pamphlet *Bhavāni Māndir*.

Taking a year's leave from the Baroda Service in 1906, Aravinda settled in Calcutta. He worked as editor of various nationalist papers and attended important political meetings, even in western India.

Arrested in connection with the Alipore Conspiracy Case, Aravinda Ghose was an undertrial prisoner in Alipore Jail from May 5, 1908, till May 6, 1909. He left a changed man as evidenced by the famous Uttarpara Speech, delivered shortly after his release.

Rumours of a fresh arrest made him seek refuge in the then French enclave of Pondicherry. He was to stay there for the entire second half of his long life, from 1910 to his death in 1950. From 24th November, 1926, which marks the enigmatic Day of Siddhi or Descent of Overmind, he lived in almost total isolation, leaving the organization of the Ashram to the Mother. French born Mira Alfassa was Śrī Aurobindo's associate in the pursuit of his yoga throughout the Pondicherry period. She remained head of the Ashram till her death in 1973, at the age of 95. Volume 25 of Śrī Aurobindo's Works is devoted to his writings on the Mother.

2. *Works*

A large part of his works was first serialized in the monthly *Ārya*, which he edited at Pondicherry from 1914 till January 1921. This means that his major works were all composed concurrently. Later they were published in book form, in most cases only slightly revised, but sometimes considerably expanded. This is the case especially for *The Life Divine,* the concluding chapters of which are posterior to the *Ārya* period. The complete works were published in the 30 large volumes of the Śrī Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library by the Śrī Aurobindo Ashram in 1972-1975. The various writings are introduced by valuable bibliographical notes concerning their redaction and different editions.

The range of subjects on which he wrote, and wrote at great length, is extremely varied. All was written in English, except volume 4 which contains his Bengali writings. We may briefly mention: political journalism (vols. 1 and 2); literary works, whether original — poems, plays and short stories (vols. 5-7), or translations from Sanskrit and Bengali literature (vol.8); essays on *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (vol. 14), or on *Social and Political Thought* (vol. 15).

More relevant to our purpose are the following: First, his interpretation of texts of the Hindu tradition: the two volumes on the Vedic Hymns (vols. 10 and 11); *The Upanishads* (vols. 12), and *Essays on the Gītā* (vol. 13). Second, his writings on yoga: *The*

Synthesis of Yoga (vols. 20-21) and *Letters on Yoga* (vols. 22-24). Finally, Śrī Aurobindo's *magnum opus, The Life Divine* (vol. 18-19), and his life-work, the vast epic *Savitri* (vols. 28-29).

3. *Spiritual Itinerary*

"No one can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for men to see." Indeed, more important than his external life-course is his inner, spiritual development. For it is that which provides one with the indispensable key to a proper understanding of his more important writings. Now, the phases of this 'adventure of consciousness' can be fairly well reconstructed on the basis of autobiographical data collected in volume 26, *On Himself*.

He recalls some of his pre-yogic experiences, such as the 'vast calm' which overwhelmed him as he set foot on Indian soil after his return from England. This and other experiences were not induced by any yogic exercises, and thus seem to indicate a natural predisposition for deeper conscious awareness. The formal practice of yoga was first undertaken at Baroda: "I did not start yoga till about 1904." This Śrī Aurobindo ventured upon without the guidance of any spiritual mentor or guru. But he did so with great earnest over a period of three years, sometimes practising *prāṇāyāma* for as much as 6 hours a day. Yet, no significant spiritual progress was achieved.

Accordingly, he sought the help of a professional yogi, one Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, whom he would always acknowledge as having been his true guru. They met at Baroda in 1908. Following the guru's instructions he achieved within just three days a complete vacuity of thought. Together with the shattering experience of the inanity of all contingent reality he also attained the realization of the absolute, acosmic Brahman. This feeling abided with him for several months after.

To this first major experience there succeeded a second, complementary realization. It was attained during his term in Alipore Jail. Here Śrī Aurobindo was "doing the *sādhanā* of the Gītā". As a result he had a quasi hallucinatory vision of Śrī Krishna manifested in all things: the branches of a tree, the bars of his cell, the jailers, etc. The experience was pronouncedly theistic in nature and thus stands in sharp contrast with the Baroda experience. Whereas the latter was that of the formless Brahman alone, in the absence of all other reality, at present the Divine was seen as abiding in all beings.

These spiritual experiences influenced his decision to abandon the arena of politics: "I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my Yoga." About the long Pondicherry period autobiographical data are extremely scanty, but Śrī Aurobindo does refer to the synthesis he achieved of the two above-mentioned experiences: that of the acosmic, and that of the cosmic Brahman. The crowning success of his "decades of spiritual effort" he considered to be the attainment of the "higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind". Truly, all of.his life was yoga.

4. Integral Yoga

Rather than a rational, philosophical system Śrī Aurobindo has developed a world-vision based on his yogic experience. The concepts used are primarily categories of consciousness. This may be exemplified by one of his exegetical works, the *Essays on the Gītā.* Together with tradition he recognizes in the Bhagavad Gītā a synthesis of the triple *mārga* of *karma, jñāna* and *bhakti.* But he rejects the more recent interpretation of *niṣkāma karma* as selfless, social action. Instead of the denial of the ego there must be its integration into one's own deeper self. Now, the ego pertains to the realm of matter or nature: integrated into pure self-consciousness this lower nature, which corresponds to mere ego-consciousness, is raised to the level of a higher, spiritual nature. One recognizes here the *aparā* and *parā prakṛti* of BG 7.5. If further, action belongs to the realm of matter, and knowledge to that of the spirit, then the integration of the ego into the self involves the integration as well of Action and Knowledge.

Integral yoga must remain incomplete without the third dimension, Bhakti. As Śrī Aurobindo understands the term, Devotion is but a synonym of Knowledge. The object of such bhakti is not a theistic God, it is the knower's own Self, which he seeks to realize. The Puruṣottama of the Gītā thus figures as an ideal for the yogi to achieve. In this Śrī Aurobindo is in agreement with the main stream of the yoga tradition, which at its best allots to Īśvara but a secondary place, as a mere means to the attainment of one's own self.

The key to Śrī Aurobindo's 'speculative' categories, we said, is to be found in his yogic experiences. This is particularly clear in the *Essays.* Seizing upon BG 8.20-22 he makes the triad of Kṣara

Brahman, Akṣara Brahman and Puruṣottama the basic pattern of his reading of the Bhagavad Gītā. However, these three terms, as he understands them, correspond to three important realizations of his yogic progress. The Kṣara Brahman, the active self involved in matter which it integrates, answers the Alipore experience of the Divine in all. The Akṣara Brahman, the pure self divorced from matter which it transcends, reflects the Baroda experience of the acosmic Absolute. The Puruṣottama, resulting from the previous two, matches Śrī Aurobindo's own synthesis of the cosmic and acosmic modes of consciousness.

It is clear from the above instances from the *Essays* that his exegesis of classical texts is a creative reinterpretation in terms of his own yogic experience. The same holds good for his interpretation of the Vedic Hymns. These do not witness to the worship of divinised nature-forces, as Orientalists used to assert. They enshrine a hidden 'Secret': the knowledge of the deeper and higher levels of consciousness, long lost, but rediscovered now by Śrī Aurobindo. Sanskritists of repute, such as P.V. Kane and L. Renou, have not been converted to this theory.

5. *Future Evolution*

Neither a commentary on classical texts nor a treatise on yoga, *The Life Divine* may be considered as his most representative work. Its characteristic feature is the concept of evolution. But here again yoga is the basic theme.

Evolution as set forth in *The Life Divine* does have a speculative aspect: evolution, it is maintained, can be explained only by a prior involution. The ascending sequence of Matter-Life-Mind is inexplicable unless one accepts the veiled pre-existence of life in matter, of mind too, and even of Spirit itself. Why not just mind? It is of course true that mind is thus far the latest manifestation in the self-unfolding process of evolution. But precisely, this mind is driven by a boundless aspiration to transcend its own limits. If the thrust of evolution is beyond mind towards Spirit, then the original impetus must derive from the Absolute itself. Śrī Aurobindo thus envisages and justifies a future evolution, that of man's consciousness.

But if the future evolution is one of consciousness, so was past evolution. The latent presence of mind in life and matter, deductively proved, is also experientially vouched for by the yogi's exploration of the inframental, 'inconscient' levels of the human psyche. Similarly with future evolution: not only is it a proved necessity, it is again experientially anticipated by the yogi. Basing himself on his own yogic experience Śrī Aurobindo is in a position to outline evolution's future course. There must be a Triple Transformation, viz, psychic, spiritual and supramental. The latter, the Ascent towards Supermind, will pass successively through Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition and Overmind. Finally, the attainment of Supermind will find its consummation in the Divine Life.

With regard to this vision of the future it is important to note the following. Its description is found in the concluding chapters of *The Life Divine*. Now their redaction is posterior to the Ārya period, probably of the late 1930s. They are, therefore, the reflection of Śrī Aurobindo's mature yogic achievement. This, as we saw, he describes as the attainment of the "higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind." Further, even though future evolution is primarily of a conscious nature, it is expected to influence the realm of matter as well. The transformation of the human body, and even of the material universe, is an essential component of Integral Yoga. Again, the spiritual effort of some chosen few will benefit the whole of human kind. There is a universal dimension to this new concept of yoga, distinguishing it from an earlier, purely individualistic pursuit. Lastly, the term of future evolution is the fulfilment of man, not his attainment of God. To call the self 'God' is to usurp the term.

An analysis of *Savitri* would probably reveal the same correspondence between yogic experience and literary construction. Indeed, *Savitri* was elaborated right from the Baroda period till the final years of Śrī Aurobindo's life. It is there more than anywhere else that he revealed his own Secret. But the task of interpreting this work would be very arduous indeed.

Conclusion

The significance of Śrī Aurobindo consists, we believe, in his being a very remarkable representative of that typical dimension of Indian culture which is Yoga. Such is the true value of this great figure of the Indian Renaissance. His vision also offers a spiritualistic alternative to materialism, and this again is valuable no doubt, particularly in the present context.

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Chapter 28

Mahātmā Gandhi

(G. Soares)

A. Gandhiji's Life

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born at Porbunder in Kathiawad on October 2nd, 1869, the son of a Modh Bania who had thrice been Prime Minister in local petty states. He grew up in an orthodox and deeply religious home, his mother in particular being a fervent Vaishnavite given to many prayers, long fasts and frequent visits to the family shrine. When thirteen, Gandhi was married to Kasturbai, also a Modh Bania and of about his own age; and five years later he matriculated and left for further studies in England. The decision to cross the *'kālāpānī'* (ocean) drew down on him an excommunication from the elders of his caste and won his mother's reluctant consent only after he had promised to abstain from wine, meat and women, during all his stay abroad. It was a promise that Gandhi faithfully kept.

Three years in England gave the young Gandhi a knowledge of Law (he was called to the Bar in 1891), a fastidious taste in European clothes that was to last many years, and an obsession with the vegetarian dietetics that was to remain with him for life. Religious influences were small: he read the Bible, specially the New Testament, and also, for the first time, the Gītā-in Arnold's translation. Characteristically, he was struck by the resemblance he saw between the two.

On his return to India in 1891, Gandhi tried without much success to settle down as a practising lawyer. Then came a summons to Africa from a Muslim firm in need of legal advice: Gandhi accepted and sailed for Durban in April 1893. From the first the African years proved immensely formative. Almost on the day he landed he was flung out of a first class railway compartment, because a European fellow traveller objected to the presence of a "coolie".

The incident seems commonplace enough, but Gandhi has described it as the most creative experience of his life. For, in the long night he spent shivering and brooding in the cold, wind-swept station of Maritzburg, there was born, somewhere in the depths of his soul, the strong resolve that he would fight all such injustice without flinching — yet without ever being embittered in the fight. It was the first, faint intimation of *Satyāgraha.*

The anglicised "coolie barrister" now began to change into the Mahātmā. The change was a double one. Gandhi's religion deepened. Protestant friends, trying to convert him, drove him to a more thorough study of his own Hinduism. He found little to choose between the emotional, non-theological, non-sacramental Christianity they were offering and the religion of his fathers now being interpreted with definitely Christian overtones by progressives all over India. And so, though he may have toyed for a while with the idea of conversion, the net result of his Christian contacts was to make him a more convinced Hindu. Still, the New Testament did, he admits, "introduce him to Non-Violence," a concept which "the Gītā was to deepen and Ruskin give lasting form." Ruskin also showed him the value of a simple life, and Gandhi, always a man of prompt action, proceeded overnight to put his ideas into practice. He founded a communal ashram near Durban where a number of friends lived together a common life of very plain living and hard work. Gandhi's diet and dress were becoming progressively simpler: by 1912 he had given up European clothes and was living on fresh and dried fruit alone; already by 1906 he had, with Kasturbai's consent, taken a vow of perpetual celibacy.

At the same time the political leader was emerging. In 1894 Gandhi had organised the Natal Congress to agitate for the rights of Indians serving as indentured servants in S. Africa. He was its secretary, edited its organ *"Indian Opinion"*, championed its cases in the law courts. During the Boer war of 1899, and again in the so-called Zulu rebellion of 1906, he led an ambulance corps into the field, was mentioned in despatches and won a war medal. Meanwhile, influenced by Tolstoy and Thoreau, he had been thinking out his technique of Satyāgraha, and in the years 1909-1914 conducted two brilliant non-violent campaigns against the infamous "Black Act", which brought him two terms in prison, but eventually compelled the S. African government to yield.

Having achieved in his twenty years in Africa "a life-work of which any man might be proud", Gandhi came to India in 1914 and entered the political arena under the tutelage of the moderate Gokhale. With Gokhale's death in 1915 and that of his rival the fiery Lokmāṅya Tilak a few years later, Gandhi, whose prestige had risen immensely due to his successful intervention on behalf of the indigo cultivators of Champaran and the mill workers of Ahmedabad, found himself at the head of the growing national movement. His leadership was new and strikingly effective. In a short time the "half naked fakir" had changed the Congress from a body of anglicised, middle class lawyers, agitating in the main for better jobs, into a revolutionary mass movement, which within thirty years, and after three non-violent campaigns (the Bardoli campaign 1921, the Salt Tax campaign 1931, the individual satyāgraha and Quit India movement 1940), interspaced with long periods of constructive activity, was to bring about the peaceful transfer of power of August 1947. It was surely an impressive achievement, but not without its tragedy. Political independence was the least of Gandhi's aims: it was a complete social renewal he wanted — hence his passionate insistence on constructive activity through Khāḍar (homespun cloth), Hindu-Muslim unity and the removal of untouchability. But while the masses in their millions idolised the Mahātmā, they were slow to grasp his teaching. Even Congress, Gandhiji sadly admitted, was non-violent more from expediency than from conviction. In 1947 came the break: for the first time in thirty years Congress declined to follow his lead. Intimidated by the communal riots that followed Jinnah's call to 'direct action', they agreed to Partition. More riots followed and the long, tragic procession of refugees. In those dark days of a nation's birth-pangs, Gandhiji was at his greatest, striding through the blood-bathed villages of Bengal and Bihar, pleading for peace, and resorting to his ultimate weapon, a three-week fast, to shock his co-religionists into sanity. Peace was eventually restored — but not before an immense price had been paid. A Hindu fanatic, enraged by Gandhiji's concessions to the Muslims, shot him dead on January 30th, 1948.

B. Gandhiji's Teaching

"Most religious men I have met," says Gandhiji, "are politicians in disguise; I, however, who wear the guise of a politician am at heart a religious man." His self-appraisement is just. Gandhiji belongs to the long line of religious reformers, who from the time of Rām Mohan Roy, have striven to revive Hinduism by integrating the ethics of the New Testament with the philosophy of the Upanishads. He did not, however, inherit his ideas from the nineteenth century reformers, but arrived at them through an intensely personal odyssey, in which his boyhood Vaishnavism, Protestant contacts in England and Africa, and the writings of Tolstoy and Ruskin all had a part. What emerged was a new interpretation of Hinduism, whose distinctive features can be summed up in the key Gandhian words: *Satya* and *Ahiṃsā* (Truth and Non-Violence). As Gandhiji himself tells us: "My religion is based on Truth and Non-Violence. Truth is my God, and Non-Violence is the means to reach Him."

Satya (Truth)

"Every Hindu," says Gandhiji (and he claims to be, himself, an orthodox, '*sanātana*' Hindu), "believes in God and His oneness, in rebirth and salvation." By the oneness of God Gandhiji sometimes seems to mean some sort of monism, and he has openly called himself an advaitin. But Gandhiji is no philosopher of the schools, and his words must not be taken too technically. The general spirit of his teaching is certainly closer to the theism of the *bhakta* than to the monism of the *advaitin*. Very probably, Gandhiji had no very precise notion of God, and, like Hinduism as a whole, continually oscillated between a monistic Brahman which seemed to satisfy the exigencies of reason and a more or less theistic Hari who alone could satisfy the demands of the heart. Gandhiji's views about a personal God are equally imprecise. He had emphatically denied that God is a person — "I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts... Because God is an Idea, Law, Himself." But from other things he has said, it would seem that all that Gandhiji wishes to deny is that God has the imperfections of a human person. The fact is that 'person' for him is almost always synonymous with 'man'. The philosopher's idea of personality is, as we shall show, absent from his thinking.

Gandhiji would probably justify such ambivalence by his well-known distinction between God as He is in Himself (what he calls Absolute Truth) and God as He appears to us (Relative Truth). As

He is in Himself, God is wholly unknowable, completely beyond our paltry human norms of unity and personality. As known to us, God is conceived by each individual worshipper as personal or impersonal, embodied or abstract, according to his particular spiritual needs. Each of us apprehends the ineffable God by clothing Him with some image or symbol appropriate to the stage of spiritual growth he had attained.

> God is that indefinable something which we all feel about which we do not know. To me God is Truth and Love, God is Ethics and morality, God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and life, and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. He transcends speech and reason. He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men (*Young India:* 5-8-'25).

The particular image under which Gandhiji chooses to worship God is Truth. He does not, however, say that 'God is Truth,' but rather, that 'Truth is God.' This shift of emphasis is typically Gandhian. Gandhiji, always a man of action, prefers to define God in terms of a practical method of approaching Him ("Truth is God" — i.e., adherence to truth will lead me to God, so that the meaning of God for me here and now, whatever be His ultimate nature, is that I must be faithful to truth) rather than in terms of an abstract idea (God is "Truth").

> Deep down in me I used to say that though God may be Love, God is Truth above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that for myself, God is Truth. But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements...And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through Love. But I also found that love has many meanings, in the English language at least, and that human love, in the sense of passion, could become a degrading thing also. I found too, that love in the sense of *ahiṃsā* had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even atheists demurred to the necessity or power of truth...And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth, I should say that Truth is God *(Young India:* 31-12-'31).

What then is Truth? "A difficult question," Gandhiji admits, and proceeds to reply: "It is what the voice within tells you." Truth is therefore not *objective* — the grasping of things as they really are, but *subjective* — faithfulness to the voice within, the voice of conscience, the voice of God. But not everyone can claim to hear this inner voice. That requires a long training in single-mindedness and detachment through the discipline of the Ashram Vows, to be described below. Only one who has been through this discipline can safely rely on the utterances of his inner voice. They will always be true for him even when they seem to contradict the equally true revelations made by the inner voice of some one else. Such contradictions are in fact inevitable, since like the blind men before the elephant, each of us grasps only a partial aspect of the truth, and these partial aspects distorted by being refracted through the media of our minds may appear to be contradictory: what is true for one may be untrue for another.

> Seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another; and, hence, those who have made these experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments. Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way, strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person (i.e., 'Experiments with Truth'). Everyone should, therefore, realise his limitations before he speaks of his inner voice. Therefore we have the belief, based upon experience, that those who would make individual search after truth as God, must go through several vows (*Young India:* 31-12-'31).

The relativity of truth leads logically to the other Gandhian doctrine of the equality of religions. The great religions of the world are all elaborations of the truths revealed by the inner voices of their Founders, and hence are all partial, imperfect expressions of the one universal Religion. "Even as a tree has a single trunk but many branches and leaves, so is there one true and perfect religion but it becomes many as it passes through the human medium." All the great religions are thus fundamentally the same:

> I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom all one and were all helpful to one another (*Harijan:* 16-2-'34).

We must therefore have an "innate respect" (which is more than "just tolerance") for all religions, but, given the principle of Swadeshi, must hold on to the one we were born in. Conversion, which goes against this innate respect, is thus for Gandhiji thoroughly objectionable. Proselytism, especially as conducted by Christian missionaries, whose methods, he feels, are not always above reproach, still more so.

Rebirth, the second of the two elements which Gandhiji lays down as fundamental to Hinduism, is, with its associated law of Karma, taken over from orthodox Hinduism unchanged. *Varṇāśrama dharma* (the law of caste and the four states of life) is accepted, not in its present "popular, crude sense", which is "a monstrous parody of the original", but in what he believes to be its strictly Vedic sense. True Varṇa is "the following on the part of all of us of the hereditary and traditional calling of our fore-fathers", without any assumption of superiority by one caste over another; for, "all varṇas are equal." Varṇa in this sense will sanction certain restrictions on interdining and intermarriage, but never untouchability, which is "a heinous crime against humanity", and which "poisons Hinduism as a drop of arsenic poisons milk". *Cow-protection* is regarded by Gandhiji as "the central fact of Hinduism". The cow for him symbolises the entire sub-human world, and cow-protection becomes an expression of the "brotherhood between man and beast, indeed of man's identity with all that lives".

Salvation or *Mokṣa* consists in "freedom from birth by breaking the bonds of the flesh, by becoming one with God". Though he calls himself an advaitin, Gandhiji has little use for the *Jñāna mārga,* the way of salvation through an intuitive insight into the oneness of Ātman and Brahman. He admits the importance of the other classical ways, that of *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Karma* (detached action), but the typically Gandhian mārga is a new one, that of service through love: "The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation, and to be one with Him. This can only be done by the service of all." Gandhiji calls this the "Law of Love", or *Ahiṃsā.*

Ahiṃsā (Non-Violence)

In the sense of non-killing, *ahiṃsā* has long been a part of the Hindu-Jain tradition of Gandhiji's native Gujarat. But in Gandhism the word has taken on a deeper and more extensive meaning. Negatively, it now means "avoiding injury to anything on earth in thought, word and deed." Positively, it is "not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer."

Literally speaking, *ahiṃsā* means non-killing. But to me it has a world of meaning and takes me into realms much higher, infinitely higher, than the realm to which I would go, if I merely understood by ahiṃsā, non-killing. *Ahiṃsā* really means that you may not offend anybody, you may not harbour an uncharitable thought even in connection with one who may consider himself to be your enemy... If we return blow for blow, we depart from the doctrine of *ahiṃsā*. But I go further. If we resent a friend's action or the so-called enemy's action, we still fall short of this doctrine. But when I say, we should not resent, I do not say that we should acquiesce: but by resenting I mean wishing that some harm should be done to the enemy, or that he should be put out of the way, not even by any action of ours, but by the action of somebody else, or say, by Divine Agency. If we harbour even this thought we depart from the doctrine of *ahiṃsā (Address to the Y.M.C.A., Madras:* 16-2-'16).

Resemblances to the Christian *Caritas* are obvious, and Gandhiji admits the affiliations of ahiṃsā to the Sermon on the Mount. But Christian charity is a supernatural virtue based on the Fatherhood of God: love your neighbour because he like yourself is a child of the God you love; while ahiṃsā, strictly, does not advert to a personal God at all, but is based on the Upanishadic concept of the oneness of all life: love your neighbour, because he is in truth yourself.

Gandhiji attaches great importance to this law of love, not only as an indispensable means for attaining "Truth", but as the only legitimate and effective weapon a man can use against injustice and evil: "Non-Violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man." It is the practical use of this specifically human weapon (non-violence "is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute"), that as *Satyāgraha* has been one of Gandhiji's best-known contributions to the world.

C. Satyāgraha (Holding on to Truth)

The term Satyāgraha was coined by Gandhiji during his S. African compaign to describe the particular form of non-violent agitation he was carrying out. Although Gandhiji would like it to include non-violent action of any kind whatever, the word has retained a distinctly political flavour, and stands for the struggle against an unjust law or an unjust regime by such non-violent means, as Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Fasting.

Non-co-operation is the refusal to participate in the working of an unjust system, and will include the boycott of schools, colleges, government jobs and the legislature. Gandhian non-cooperation is always non-violent. It is "non-co-operation with a method and a system, never with men." It is therefore never uncompromising, but always implies a "readiness to co-operate on the slightest pretext with the worst of one's opponents." Compromise was in fact the aim of all Gandhiji's political manoeuvring.

Civil Disobedience is the breaking of an unjust law with the readiness to suffer the consequences. The violation of the law must never become contempt for Law. Hence only a truly unjust law may be broken, and the violator must be ready to submit to its sanction. Satyāgraha in practice thus usually comes to mean mass jail-going. Typically, Gandhiji, who served some eight terms in prison, was always a model prisoner.

Fasting is the ultimate weapon of a satyāgrahī and one which "cannot be lightly used." A satyāgraha fast must always be undertaken in a religious spirit and "never against an opponent but against a loved one, not to extract rights but to reform him." These conditions will occur but rarely, but when they do Gandhiji will allow even a fast unto death as an integral part of satyāgraha.

From what has been said it is clear that satyāgraha is very different from a passive acquiescence in evil. It is a very definite resistance. "Non-violence in its dynamic conditions does not mean weak submission to the will of the evil doer, but it means putting our whole soul against the will of the tyrant." But this resistance must always be non-violent in both the negative and positive sense; so that the satyāgrahī, while resisting an opponent unto death, always cherishes a true love for him. He aims at "dissolving not antagonists but antagonisms." True satyāgraha can thus never be a cloak for cowardice. Gandhiji, in fact, would prefer even violence to cowardly non-violence: "I do believe that where there is only choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence." But, of course, true non-violence, the non-violence of the brave, is best of all and "infinitely superior to violence."

Satyāgraha, if it be non-violent in the full sense of the word, will, Gandhiji believes, be infallibly effective. Man shares in spirit and has something of the divine. Hence, even the oppressed masses can be trained to the super-human courage and love that satyāgraha demands; while the oppressors, no matter how ruthless and violent they are, will never be quite beyond the reach of suffering love. "The hardest heart and the grossest ignorance must disappear before the fire of suffering without anger and malice." But Gandhiji has no illusions as to the difficulty of the task. The perfect practice of satyāgraha is an ideal, possibly unattainable, but towards which we can approximate by means of a long and arduous training in "self-discipline, self-control, and self-purification." Gandhiji claims to provide such a training for the satyāgrahī leader in his asceticism of the Ashram Vows.

D. Āshram Vows

The members of the Sabarmati Āshram which Gandhiji founded near Ahmedabad soon after his return from Africa were expected to take a number of vows by which they bound themselves to "constant and earnest effort in thought, word and deed," in the observance of Truth, Non-violence, Celibacy, Non-stealing, Non-possession, Control of the palate, Fearlessness, Removal of Untouchability, Bread-labour, Equality of religions and Swadeshi. Besides Truth and Non-violence in the sense described above, the most important of these eleven Āshram Vows are those of Celibacy *(Brahmacarya)*, Non-stealing *(Asteya)* Non-possession *(Aparigraha)*, and *Swadeshi.*

Brahmacarya: Marriage, according to Gandhiji, is an obstacle to the perfect practice of satyāgraha, since husband and wife lavish on each other the love they owe to the world. Hence the satyāgrahī should, if possible, abstain from marriage and take the vow of Absolute Brahmacarya, which implies "perfect control over all the senses and freedom from lust in thought, word, and deed." Where this is not possible he should vow Married Brahmacarya, or restraint in the married life, guided by the principle that marriage is a "state of discipline", a "duty", a "probation", meant "not for pleasure but for bringing forth progeny." Hence Gandhiji's repeated insistence that the only legitimate and sometimes necessary means of Birth-control is self-control. Brahmacarya is impossible unless it is part of a wider discipline for the control of all the senses and specially the palate. Hence this last is the subject of a special āshram vow.

Asteya and Aparigraha: Gandhiji interprets these in their most radical sense. In a country where millions live on the verge of starvation, even the legitimate acquisition of superfluities is a form of thieving. So, too, to possess something we do not actually and immediately need, amounts to keeping stolen goods, and betrays a lack of trust in the providence of God, to whom alone we should turn for provision for the future. Hence by these two vows the satyāgrahī resolves to "bring about a progressive reduction of his needs" down to the barest possible minimum, and to possess nothing but what is necessary for the immediate satisfaction of these bare needs. "Not to accumulate things not necessary for the day," is how Gandhiji put it in his diary.

Swadeshi: This is the "spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings, to the exclusion of the more remote." Gandhiji derives the principle from the Gītā which recommends *svadharma* (the duty of one's own state of life) as better than *paradharma* (the duty of another's state) and applies it extensively. Thus in religion swadeshi means that "I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion," in politics that "I should make use of indigenous institutions" (e.g., panchayats), in economics that "I should use only those things that are produced in my immediate neighbourhood." It is in the economic sphere that swadeshi is most familiar to us through Gandhiji's insistence on Khadar.

E. Swarāj

While the ultimate goal of satyāgraha is always Mokṣa, the salvation of the satyāgrahi, the immediate temporal goal for which Gandhiji was striving, was *Swarāj* or *Rāmrāj*, conceived not merely as political independence, but as a complete social revolution. The India of his dreams was to have been a community of self-governing, self-sufficient villages, each administered by a largely autonomous, elected panchayat, and supporting itself in frugal sufficiency through co-operative agriculture and cottage industries. Decentralisation, both political and economic, is the key-word in Gandhian planning. He is strongly opposed to a highly centralised, powerful state, which he sees as a continual threat to the freedom and growth of the individual. Ideally the state should wither away giving place to an "enlightened anarchy", where "everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour." But Gandhiji is realist enough to realise that such an ideal can never be attained in life, and hence falls back on Thoreau's maxim: that government is best which governs least. He is equally against heavy industrial concentration and the "indiscriminate multiplication of machines," which, in a country like India with an overabundant supply of labour, must lead to widespread unemployment, the mass exploitation of the poor by the rich and of one country by another, and the "atrophying of the limbs of man." Always, in Gandhiji's mind, "the individual is the one supreme consideration."

Gandhiji's concept of private property is contained in his well-known principle of "Trusteeship". The owner has the right to what he needs for his sustenance, but the surplus must be regarded as a trust which he holds from God on behalf of the needy. It is not quite clear how far the owner loses his right to the surplus — at any rate Gandhiji will not allow any forcible dispossession, as that would go against ahiṃsā.

Conclusion

The value of Gandhism lies in its decisive stand for religious and moral values in an irreligious and amoral age: in its insistence on Truth and Love, on the morality of means even in the 'dirty game' of politics, on self-control and continence. Yet inspiring as all this is, Gandhism remains, not a perfect system, but the partial and imperfect acquisitions of a "humble but very earnest seeker after Truth." There is a fundamental deficiency in the system — the absence of a proper notion of 'spirit'. Following the Hindu tradition Gandhiji regards spirit as 'life' rather than as 'person', and as the negation of matter rather than its integrating principle.

Hence, for Gandhiji, a spiritual being is not as it is for the Christian, a 'person' — a being possessing itself in a unique way and therefore self-determining and holy, possessing inviolable rights and superior to everything merely material — but simply a higher form of life. God is therefore looked upon as an impersonal force, a "living power"; and man is a living entity in some way identical with God, yet not specifically different from the lower forms of life: "all life (not only human beings but all sentient beings) is one, i.e., coming from the one universal source." The ethics of such a system will obviously be *ahiṃsā* or non injury to all that lives based on the unity of all life, rather than *charity* or respect for all persons based on the intimate relation each person has to God. Obviously too, since life rather than person is the absolute value, Gandhism will not permit violence even for the defence of a legitimate right. Socially, this idea of spirit is reflected in Gandhiji's distrust of the State. While he could appreciate the spontaneous living unity of the family or community, Gandhiji had no sympathy for the planned organised unity of the state, conceived as a society of persons working together for a common end. He always thought of the state as an organ of repression, which, ideally, should wither away.

Gandhiji's firm conviction that spirit is the negation of matter also leads him astray. Matter is conceived as an obstacle to the growth of the spirit, and liberation consists precisely in freeing the soul from the "bonds of the flesh." There is therefore in *Brahmacarya*, *Aparigraha* and all the other grand ideals of Gandhian asceticism, a certain puritanism, a touch of the fear of the flesh. This devaluation of materiality explains, also, why the idea of an historical revelation, of God speaking in and through the world, is so repugnant to Gandhiji. For him, God must speak to the soul directly, through the "inner voice." Hence his subjectivism, leading inexorably to the much publicised principles of the relativity of truth and the equality of all the great religions.

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Chapter 29

The Present Situation

(R. De Smet)

The 1992-93 "noise and fury" around the claim of *Hindutva* have puzzled many an observer. How essentially political were they? How revealing of a truly religious revival of Hinduism? Let us try to view the Hindu scene from a central watchtower.

1. A Perspective from the Nagpur RSS Seat

In 1925, Dr. K.B. Hedgewar founded the *Rāshtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) as a national Volunteers Organization distinct from the older *Hindu Mahāsabhā*. Its aim was to revitalize Hinduism as the dominant culture to which minorities should subordinate themselves and to achieve a *Hindu rājya*. Its *shākhās* (branches) would form young men, through physical training and cultural tutoring focused on the *Dharma,* into fully committed nationalist but not political activists.

This immunity from politics was severely strained at the time of Partition when some *shākhās* indulged in anti-Muslim violence for which the RSS was banned for a while. Its new Leader, M.S. Golwalkar, never comfortable with political activities, rejected in 1950 S.P. Mookerjee's proposal to form a new party with the RSS. Nevertheless, pressures from within and without forced him to agree in 1951 to the formation of a political offspring of the RSS, the *Jana Sangh*. The RSS would exercise a strict supervision to ward it from deviating from the RSS values. Full-time RSS cadres were delegated to be the JS leaders. This hierarchical arrangement has endured. But in the course of years, the balance of power has tended to shift from Nagpur to Delhi, especially since the BJP took the succession of the JS after the failed *Janata Party* experiment of 1977. The BJP marginalized the Nagpur keepers of the Maharashtrian Brāhmin traditionalism and went on for the Ayodhya adventure and the rampant use of money power during the recent election campaign. The cohesiveness and ethical superiority — made of discipline, loyalty and austerity — of the RSS have been sorely bruised. Through its involvement in political struggles, it has obscured if not destroyed its image of a *dharmik* organization committing its members to nation-building and selfless social work.

What the election results appear to show is that the Hindu masses of North-India resist the identification of their Hinduism with any political ideology and are not easily, or are only momentarily, swayed by politicians who exploit their Hindu allegiance to boost up their own self-aggrandizing. As to the RSS, its younger volunteers can naturally get enthusiastic for political aggressiveness, but its general acceptance by the Hindu masses depends on its traditionalism. Its members ought to meditate on the words of the Kashmiri king Chandrapida (680-688 AD) to his officers who wanted to evict a cobbler from the field on which they intended to build a temple:

> Stop the construction or build [the temple] elsewhere!
> By grabbing the land of others
> We will only be committing a grave sin.
> If we, the custodians of law, act ourselves unlawfully
> who would then abide by law? *(Rājatarangini* 4. 55-70)

2. The Hinduism of the Rural Masses

About 80% of the Hindus are villagers. They are not insulated from such influences as emanate from the ideologies of parties or from the RSS *shākhās* of the District headquarters; through the media (especially TV movies or video films, often with mythological or social themes) and the schoolbooks they are exposed to secularizing modernization; yet they remain firmly rooted in their ancestral ways and beliefs.

The important people are the rich landowners, the Brāhmin *pūjāri*, who conducts most of the life-cycle rituals, possibly a *vaid* physician, many types of healer-exorcists *(bhagat, ojhā)* and astrologers *(jyotishi)*. Important also are the wandering *sādhus*. Through all these, the Sanskritic tradition seeps in some measure into the rural minds. Epic and Purāṇic legends enter their memories. Pilgrimages to the great *tīrthas* (Vāranasi, Allahabad, Hardwar, Kedarnāth, Nāshik, Tirupati, Rāmeswaram) or nearer shrines add to this the emotional sharing in a religion which is both hoary and all-Indian. *Grām-devatās* (tutelary village-deities) get identified with gods and goddesses of the literary tradition but retain their particular ritualistic identity and often dangerous character.

Indeed, the belief content of the villagers has little to do with literary Hinduism. When asked about God, they say that there are many gods (*ḍih,* village deities) but only one Bhagavān, Parameshwar or Rām (often praised through *bhajans* or mythological *kīrtans).* But what they feel is the invisible presence of a Power which is supposed to take on numberless forms, often benign or neutral but more often malevolent. Those dangerous forms are ghosts, demons, godlings, disease-goddesses like smallpox *Śitalā Devi* or *Āy*. Witches, male and female, evil eye and curse are also feared. Belief in the law of *karma* is vague, but belief in fate *(tagdīr)* is very strong. Then there are all kinds of objects, actions and persons whose touch is alleged to cause impurity. At home, children are educated chiefly in the concern for ritual purity and security from evil influences rather than in ethical values. The latter are village and school norms of proper behaviour whose observance is controlled by the gossip lines. As to the value of nationalism, peasant Hinduism is generally indifferent.

The urban people's denial of all that as superstition has hardly affected villagers whose uppermost concern continues to be the counteracting of all those alleged sources of disease, infertility, death, failure or other calamity. This is why each village has its diagnosticians, ritual experts, exorcists, astrologers and healers, why it welcomes sādhus, yogis and other "holy men", and why it spends much in rituals and gifts (especially from *jajmān* to relatives and other caste-groups) besides festivals and pilgrimages. All this fosters the network of partnership between the occupational groups or castes. Even Muslims are included somehow into this network and there is in the village no particular Hindu-Muslim tension except when communal riots start in the nearest city.

3. The Urban Hinduism

Those Hindus who are not newcomers into a city but second or third generation urbanites have shed much of the grassroot village Hinduism. Apart from the essential *saṁskāras* (weddings, initiations of high-caste sons and funerals,) they easily profess to be rejecting rites as superstitions. Or they practise minimal Ārya-samāj or other neo-hindu rites, unless they belong to a fervent (especially a Vaiṣṇava) sect or have kept in touch with their ancestral village and its rituals. They have also shed much of their fear of malevolent entities. When illness strikes, they go to medical doctors, either āyurvedic, homeo- or allopathic and only in desperate cases to a *bhagat*. Instead of ritualistic observances, they tend to uphold (but not necessarily to conform to) ethical values. Their public ethos is puritan, and at least parents feel very uneasy before the intrusion of sex into the visual media; but violence in movies is often tolerated although *ahiṁsā* is a praised value.

The belief system of the many English-speaking urbanites is a simplified form of neo-hinduism. Its sources are the modern swāmis (Rāmakrishna Mission, Vaswāni Mission, Shivānanda Society, Muktānanda Āshram, Chinmaya Mission, etc.), Bhāratiya Vidyā Bhavan publications, schools, newspapers, Christian values as selectively integrated by the Indian Renaissance pioneers and Western secular values as embodied in the Constitution of India and the ideologies of diverse political parties. The resulting belief of the urban middle classes is a syncretistic conservatism diversely structured according to their allegiance to Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism or some form of Vedānta. Many parents seek to have their children admitted to Christian schools — which are largely open to them — and quite approve the kind of bland monotheism and neutral ethics diffused by those schools to their non-Christian students.

They generally believe that the universe had no temporal beginning but passes cyclically from creation to destruction followed by other creations and destructions under the sovereignty of a Creator God. They worship him according to one of the forms of his majesty (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva) or the form of their preferred mythic deity. Creatures are in the bondage of ignorance and rebirth due to *karma*, but it is no longer believed that human beings can be reborn in subhuman forms. Ways are available towards deliverance, especially the *yogas* or *mārgas* taught in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Chiefly since about twenty years, these Hindus have been attracted by charismatic personalities, imitators of Vivekānanda (including the propaganda tours abroad) or in the tradition of the Sai Babas like Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi. These explain to them in highly syncretistic fashion the Gītā *karma-mārga* or way of works in terms of *svadharma* and *niṣkāma-karma* (BhG), social service (Gospel), *satyāgraha* (Gandhi), *dayā* (Buddha) and *bhakti* (BhG and Purāṇas). They repeat the slogans of Vivekānanda about the equality of all religions, of Radhakrishnan about the subordination of all religions under Advaita Vedānta, or of Dayānand about the "scientific" character of the Vedas.

Many of those Hindus choose a *guru* or spiritual guide, who may be a renouncer or a layman. The renouncer's celibacy inspires the kind of trust which is preferable in *guru-sisya* (guide-disciple) relationship. The disciple will take advice from the guru for his life-decisions and on a hint from him incline to austerity and to special vows or supplementary practices. The guru may have few or many or, like Sathya Sai Baba, even a large number of disciples. These relationships foster the strength of the religious concern of those urbanites. Is *yoga* much practised by them? It was not much practised forty or even thirty years ago but, after it became attractive to many Westerners, a number of those Hindus have taken to either *rāja-* or *haṭha-yoga* at least temporarily.

In this milieu, *sādhus* used to be considered as undesirable parasites of society. But the new type of charismatic and guru-*swāmis* has again set in honour the choice of *saṅnyāsa,* i.e., the monk's life of renunciation. Hence, not a few young or mature men leave their home to join one of the monastic orders.

In the cities there are also traditional Brāhmins. They rise up early and spend the first 4 or 5 hours of the day in tasks of cleanliness, recitation of mantras or long tracts of Sanskrit texts memorized from youth, ritual *pūjā* and meditation. After a meal, they set out for their professional tasks and in the evening they again devote 2 or 3 hours to bathing and rituals. They may go to a *satsaṅg* (gathering of devotees) or to a scholarly lecture but shun secular entertainments; yet the ubiquitous television has invaded even their homes. Some of them are professional sanskritists. But their kind is rapidly decreasing. Their children choose other avocations (engineering, medicine, law, etc.) and often expatriate themselves and give them American, Canadian or European grandchildren.

There is another upper fringe of city Hindus to be considered, the agnostics. They are found mainly among the scientists, the university professors and college lecturers, the physicians, the magistrates, the social workers, the politicians. Many of these profess irreligion but what they mean is rejection of mythical beliefs and ritualistic practices (which are, however, often retained and taught to their small children by their womenfolk). Seldom are those men devoid of deep interest in theology and of all belief in a supreme Reality that superintends the world it has created.

4. The Dalits

A Vaiṣṇava saint, Narsi Mehta, had in a poem called the "Untouchables" *Harijans*, the children of Hari. The name appealed to Gandhi but was vehemently opposed by Ambedkar as well as the appellation "Depressed Castes". However, a list of all the castes which suffered from disabilities arising from untouchability had been appended as a schedule to the Government of India Act, 1935. For lack of agreement on another appellation the Constituent Assembly adopted this neutral name "Scheduled Castes" (SC) in 1950. The 1953 *Untouchability (Offences) Act* has been replaced by the much better *Civil Rights Protection Act* of 1976, but this Act is badly known even by Police Officers and thus not seriously enforced.[1]

Not counting the aboriginal Scheduled Tribes (ST), more than 150 million people belong to the SC category divided into about 1,000 endogamous subcastes. Their origin is pre-Buddhistic. In the Aryan lands, life was centred on *yajña*, sacrifice. Active participation in it was restricted to the four v*arṇas*, others were debarred. This is the origin of the ritualistic distinction between so-called pure and impure castes. With the development from around 500 B.C. of the religions upholding *ahiṁsā* and, later, of vegetarianism (commonly adopted by 400 A.D.) fishing, hunting, slaughtering, leatherwork, sweeping, scavenging, etc. became reserved to those "impure" castes which gradually became treated as untouchables.

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[1] Neither the Constitution nor the Acts have defined untouchability. It implied the exclusion of the SC from the use of the high castes' streets, temples, wells, public places, toilets, conveyance facilities and institutions, etc. In the words of Nani Palkhivala: "For the untouchables the harshness of life was so characterized by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency" *(The Illustrated Weekly of India,* 23.2.1991, p.18).

(a) *The socio-economic condition of the SC*

Thus a discrimination of religious origin has turned into a social ostracism and a vocational and economic degradation. Despite the principle of equality and the human rights inscribed in the Constitution and the uplifting measures adopted by the Government, the status and condition of the SC have hardly improved. Even the Sixth Five-Year Plan document for 1980-85 (Planning Commission, p. 417) admitted:

> Three decades of development have not had the desired impact on these socially, economically and educationally handicapped groups. Their problems cannot be resolved through the percolation of general economic growth. The majority of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who form one-quarter of the population, are below the poverty line...Continuing to pursue traditional occupations, they are unable to participate fully in the process of modernisation. The practice of untouchability against Scheduled Castes is a special handicap for them and even the few educated groups amongst them are unable to compete for job opportunities created.

(b) *Earlier attempts of SC emancipation*

Apart from the insufficiently implemented Government Acts and measures, other attempts had been made to uplift the SC. These had tried, but seldom with success, to force open to themselves the temples of the "pure" sanskritic deities so that they could look at them *(darśan)*, offer *pūjā* and receive a *prasāda* on leaving them. They are still reduced to worship only their non-sanskritic deities which are "impure" to the caste-Hindus. The SC are Hindus too, yet outside the Hindu fold.

During the last hundred years, SC individuals and groups had converted to some other religion, becoming Sikhs or Muslims or Buddhists or Christians. Such conversions had alarmed the caste Hindus, especially the Ārya Samāj and the landowners (80% of the SC work for them on low wages and at times without wage *(begar)* or are bonded labour), and conversions had been stopped by threats and violence or reconversion *(śuddhi)* and sanskritization. In Punjab, for instance, the Ārya Samāj bestowed to the re-converted the right to wear a tuft *(choti)* and a sacred thread *(janyoo)* and to enter its temples, made them part of a *varṇa* (Dusadhs being called offspring of Durshashan, Chamars offspring of Randas, etc.), gave them a Vedic name like Omprakāsh, Vedprakāsh, and made them give up beef-eating and adopt cremation and Vedic rites. It declared that the sweepers' god Lal Beg or Bala Shah was really Vālmīki, the legendary author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Gandhi had tried to dissociate untouchability from Hinduism, his argument being that there was no scriptural sanction for all the degradations that practice implied. But Gandhi as well as the neo-Vedāntins upheld the *varnāśrama-dharma* as the ideal scheme for social harmony and purity of life. Thus they were not ready for emancipating the SC whereas this was the very aim of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. The latter militated in many ways in that direction. Finally in 1956 he directed over a million Mahārs (the subcaste to which he belonged) to "take their refuge in the Buddha, the Saṅgha and the Dharma." Now the Neo-Buddhists are about 35 lakhs. He had also started various attempts to form a socialist party which culminated in the Republican Party of India. However, after his death, splits in this Party manifested the usual weakness and disunity of the SC, partly due to the fact that their MP and MLA depend on the Congress Party which rewards them for their allegiance.

Conversion did not automatically improve the social status of the SC converts or their poverty (Christians lost all SC constitutional privileges). Betterment happened only to some groups. For instance, if Christians or at least in contact with a church, SC found access to good schools so that many became literate and some reached even high professions (nurses, doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.). Even a minimal education allowed many to enter the administration and public services or even the Lok Sabha or the States' legislative assemblies, about 15 percent of the seats in all these being reserved for them.

Many SC have become urbanized. What they found in the cities was occupational change, from landless village servants and agricultural labourers to factory workers, rickshaw-pullers or drivers, office peons, watchmen, construction gangs but, apart from such relatively privileged jobs, they formed the lowest segment of the urban economy. Their migration, often into the slums, implied the discontinuity of their traditional ways, including often their religious customs and interdicts, but no great status mobility and alteration. They could send their children to school but seldom to college and university. Thus, even in the cities, the condition of the SC has remained generally precarious.

(c) *The arising of the Dalits*

The awareness of this has raised a generation of angry young men who in the early seventies began to call themselves DALITS, the oppressed, the downtrodden. It is to be noted that they were city-born and educated, aware of the existence of similarly oppressed angry young men in other parts of the world and highly sensitive to their discriminatory social status. Some of them began to publish poems and pamphlets marked by total rejection of caste values, religion and society, advocation of violent and total revolution, and often scurrilous but vigorous language. Dalit poems were cries which awoke the SC youth in Maharashtra first and then in other states. Here are a few samples:

> Mahatmas have come and Mahatmas have gone
> But the sufferings have not gone. The sufferings won't go
> Until the exploited awake and arise
> To break the shackles and bondage. (A.S. Rajan)

> I reject your Parameshwar-centred traditions
> I reject our religion-based literature. (V.L. Kalekar)

> They rushed and flowed like water
> When my people began to speak...
> Vedas, Purāṇas, shastras and godowns of guns
> floated like leaves and garbage
> and were carried to the sea...
> Brushing aside gods and gurus to dunghill
> pushing ministers and legislatures to gutter
> Dalits went in procession on the way
> they themselves had found (Siddhalingaiah).

The politicizing of the Dalits had begun after the 1969 Congress split when incidents of violence and atrocities directed at the SC increased so much that they became a political issue in the Lok Sabha in 1972. But the Republican Party did not treat it with enough vigour, and a band of Dalit militants reacted by forming the *Dalit Panther* organization in June-July 1972. It began enthusiastically with the aim of total revolution but very soon it split repeatedly. By 1976, four splits had resulted in four factions. Its weakness arose not only from the young age of its leaders and cadres but chiefly from the uncertainty of their ideology. On the one hand, their aim was total revolution even through violent means; on the other hand, they upheld the tenets of Buddhism which emphasizes non-violence and the ideas of Ambedkar who stressed constitutional means. They meant to co-operate with parallel movements and dreamed of unifying the whole proletariat, but this was hampered by their suspicion of Marxism and their allegiance to Ambedkar's Buddhism which made them sectarians. Besides, they spoke of revolution, but their life-style was "middle-class". Finally, apart from rejecting the whole existing system, they could not agree on a really feasible plan to achieve the total revolution they envisaged. Actually by 1979 even though they were arriving at the formulation of parallel programmes, the *Dalit Panther* organization came close to collapsing. It survived but to concentrate its struggle on parochial targets, like the renaming of the Marathwada University as Dr. B.R. University achieved only in January 1994.

There were other groups than the Panthers: Dalit Action Committee, Ambedkar Association, Dalit Sanghvarsh Samithi, Harijan League, Depressed Classes League, Bharat Dalit Sevak Sangh, Harijan Sevak Sangh and other Congress supported organizations.

(d) *Today's grounds for hope*

Under the mounting pressure of the SC, ST and Other Backward Classes (OBC) (chiefly Jats, Ahirs, Yādavs, Kurmis, Koeris, Gurjars, etc.) the Janata Government formed in 1979 the Mandal Commission *to examine the desirability or otherwise of making provision for the reservation of appointments or posts...in public services.* The Report recommended such reservation for 52% of the posts, this being the proportion of all the BC to the total population. In 1990, the V.P. Singh Government decided to implement a limited part, namely, 27% of the recommended reservations. The upper caste Hindu (students chiefly) opposed this with riots, self-immolations and violence fanned by the Hindi press. That government fell. The Mandal issue was then entrusted to the Supreme Court. In its 1992 verdict, the Court decided that reservation of jobs, but not of promotions, for the backward classes (to be identified on socio-economic, but not exclusively on economic, grounds) is permissible; it will concern 27% of central government jobs; its total should not exceed 50% in government jobs; it is not advisable in certain technical posts. This is a decisive step forward in the fulfilment of the mandate of equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution, however much criticism or anger it has raised. Agitation over it quickly receded in contrast to 1990, for the press had to turn its attention to the vagaries of the *Hindutva* offensive.

Meanwhile, indeed, upper caste Hindu communalism had been growing through various organizations, the Jana Sangh and the BJP being the foremost ones. It reached its highest point of recklessness in the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, but this became the starting point of its decline. Even the Hindi press denounced the vandalism of the Sangh pariwar. Its decline has been proved by the results of the 1993 elections. And these elections have given to the united BC parties, the *Bahujana Samāj Party* and the *Samājwādi Party,* the triumph which ushered in the first ever BC Government of a large Indian State, Uttar Pradesh. This is a harbinger of the similar triumphs which may be expected if the social minorities can realize the need of uniting for a common struggle.

(e) *The SC and religion*

Even in the South-Indian villages, the SC are increasingly asserting their right to stay away from collective festivals, in which they act ritually as musicians and slaughterers, because this reflects their servitude. Elsewhere also they have mostly desisted from struggling for admission into the caste-temples and rather tend to reject Hinduism wholesale since for them it means inequality. This rejection is easier in the towns where they merge into a relative anonymity, lose their fear of spirits and other superstitions and attain a degree of economic if not social upward mobility.

The French revolutionaries of 1789 had inscribed on their flags their twofold pursuit: LIBERTY-EQUALITY. But soon they felt the need of adding a third goal, FRATERNITY. What our SC feel is that some progress has been made towards the first two but hardly any towards the third goal. Socialistic ideologies cannot provide it but only religion. A religion, if unmarred by exclusivism or unegalitarianism, can create a brotherhood founded on a vision concerning the whole human destiny. It provides meaning rather than explanation, hope rather than practical solutions and acknowledged human dignity instead of indifference or contempt. In different measures, Sikhism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity have given that to their SC adherents but without the full awareness that the latter yearn desperately for that vision and that brotherhood.

From the twenties, the Chamars and other SC of the Jallandar region found them in the newly born "Religion of the Origin", ĀDDHARM. It claims as its patron Sant Ravidās, an outcaste Vaiṣṇava saint of the 16th century. It is both monotheistic and highly ethical but on the basis of equality and brotherhood. It embraces the values of modern society: equal opportunity, reward based on merit, reverence, temperance, truth, honesty and reason. It fosters the means of achieving them: self-discipline, education, hard work. Its centre, Boota Mandi, is indeed a hive of education, busy work, commercial success, health care and a life free of humiliation in a fraternal community which is proud of the new caste dignity it has forged for itself.

Conclusion: The Present Challenges

For over a century, pre-independent India had endeavoured to assimilate and integrate what it considered valuable in the Western civilization, whether secular or religious. The achievements of the Indian Renaissance, chiefly due to some industrialists with foresight and humanists with concern for the common good, were remarkable. Since Independence, what too often prevails is concern for one's or one's own group's particular good. This is the root of the various fundamentalisms, the dominance of vested interests, the politicians' greed, the bureaucratic corruption, the poor implementation by the states of wise corrective Acts and measures taken in Delhi. Even the revival of Hinduism is vitiated by it. It is reactionary, aggressive against other religious communities and against the small gains made by the oppressed classes.

Over against all this the constitutional secularism of our democracy is embattled but remains an ideal which the majority of Indians want to be maintained. The greatest challenge of our time to the Hindus is to rediscover the ideals of the Renaissance pioneers as well as all the sources of the religious greatness of Hinduism. Hinduism had been dynamized by a love and service of God which blossomed — especially with Tulasidās and then the Renaissance — into a love and service of all other beings, a concern for *parahitam*. Cessation of inhuman discrimination and unjust oppression, reconciliation and cooperation between the opposed communities, concrete universalism à la Mohan Roy are urgent demands.

The less selfish a man's religious life is, the truer and purer his religion will be. Which are the motivations of the Hindus in their religious exertions? Often those mentioned by Vyāsa centuries ago:

> ***Dharmād arthas-ca kāmas-ca so dharmaḥ kim na sevayate*:**
> From religion are obtained both wealth and delights,
> then why not practise religion since it is such?

Indeed, but since Vyāsa, the Hindu Dharma has been enriched not only by the practice of *bhakti* but also by the extension of *seva* from the deities to our neighbours and the poor whom Vivekānanda called Daridra Nārāyaṇa.

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